

THE LIFE AFTER DEATH RESEARCHERS:
THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR PASTORAL CARE

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DEDICATION

For Chris, my wife and companion, through whom I have learned to
love, and who has given me hope for life.

For Ray and Mary Lou, who have encouraged me.

IN MEMORIUM

In Memory of Edward, whose life on this earth ended in the mid-morning
of his years.

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ABSTRACT

The project undertakes to assess the current "life-after-death" research and conclusions of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and Raymond A. Moody Jr., in the perspective of Biblical understandings of life, death, and after-life, and in the theological context of Wolfhart Pannenberg's concept of the Christian doctrine of Resurrection.

Moving toward a more adequate quality of pastoral care for those experiencing their own dying is one of the ultimate goals of this project. Secondly, it is a goal of this project to contribute some perspectives toward integrating the evaluation of the life-after-death research into pastoral care for the entire parish, both in its attitudes and responses to death, dying, and sorrowing, as a part of life.

Methodologically, this is achieved by examining in detail the findings and conclusions of the life-after-death researchers. Secondly, it is achieved by examining Biblical understandings of life, death, afterlife, and resurrection through (a) tracing concepts and their development through the texts, and (b) exegeting specific texts. Thirdly, it moves to theological reflection on the Christian doctrine of Resurrection with effort to place ancient concepts in the light of today's theological and anthropological understandings. Finally, a response is offered, Biblically and theologically, to some specific research data and conclusions of the life-after-death researchers.

The project aims, not toward conclusions within a closed theological context, but rather, toward reflections and responses

which seek to serve as a theological resource for pastoral care in dealing with death and dying for those in varied theological settings, and for varied patterns of pastoral style.

It is hoped that this work may serve as a springboard for others who are doing theologizing within a parish setting, upon the experience of death and dying, and its meaning to our world. Our attitudes toward ours and others' dying contributes to our outlook upon the meaning of the portion of life we live in the dimensions of time and space.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

I. The Context

Until relatively recently, little attention has been given for many years to the subject of death and dying, either by the secular world or by the church in American society. Now it has become the "vogue" to speak of such matters in many circles.

Significant research is being done upon the subject in the scientific world.

The church has had little to say that is original upon the subject for a great length of time. The so-called "liberal" sector of the church has long since given up the fearful medieval notions of afterlife, but has stood in embarrassed silence (in a scientific world) with its accumulated and varying doctrines of resurrection, afterlife, immortality et cetera. Thus far, that part of church which claims to be contemporary has not made the experience of death and dying theologically intelligible to Christians, to say nothing of addressing the world upon the subject.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross is acclaimed by many to be a pioneer in the field of research of death and dying. This project is particularly interested in her research with her patients who have been in "near death" situations or who have been pronounced clinically dead. Her findings and conclusions have commanded respectable audiences in widespread areas. Her research, she states, has led her to believe in

life after death "beyond the shadow of a doubt".¹ Her work has been for the most part, duplicated unwittingly by a psychiatrist, Raymond A. Moody, though he does not arrive at the conclusion of certainty that his research "proves" life after death.²

Careful scrutiny needs to be given to this research in terms of determining whether or not it may serve as a resource in our attempts to formulate a contemporary theological perspective and pastoral approach in a world which denies the experience of death.³ This project attempts to accomplish this by placing the research in the perspective of Biblical understandings of life, death, and afterlife; it seeks to contemporize a theological response to the research by delineating Wolfhart Pannenberg's theological reflections on the doctrine of Resurrection as understood by him in the light of modern concepts of history.

The published material on the recent "life-after-death" research is being widely-read and accepted by the general public. Those in the church are no exception. They are in need of leadership in relating this material to Christian thought.

The minister may be faced with the experience of death at any time in the local parish. It is the one time when even those who have

¹ Ann Nietzke, "The Miracle of Kübler-Ross " Human Behavior, (September 1977), 22.

² Raymond A. Moody, Life After Life (New York: Bantam, 1975), p. 182.

³ Ernst Becker, The Denial of Death (New York: Macmillan, 1973), p. 2.

had a most casual relationship with the church seek out the assistance and counsel of the clergy. Pastoral care is needed by the one who is dying and by those who surround her or him as loved-ones. Adequate pastoral care demands as one ingredient, grounding in Biblical and theological statements on death, and its consequences.

Therefore, this project undertakes the assessment of the "life-after-death" research of Kübler-Ross and Moody in the light of Christian faith for the express purpose of providing theological and ethical substance for pastoral care in the contemporary local parish, and the community which provides its context.

II. Definition of Terms

A. Life.

Science does not yet claim to give a definition of life. It does, however, have assertions about some characteristics of life. One such characteristic, for example, is that life is linked to a substance called protoplasm. This living matter is a system of structures and functions which occurs together only in cellular organization.⁴

Biblically and theologically, life is considered a characteristic of God, and is given of God. Life is the presupposition of all salutary action in humankind. Life is the participation of humanity in the life of God that makes possible and prepares humans for the

⁴ Karl Rahner (ed.) Encyclopedia of Theology (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 843.

eternal. Eternal life may be understood to be a continuing life, a quality of life, and a state of existence.⁵

B. Death

Death is the cessation of life, the ultimate ending of human life as we know it.

Scientifically, one is "clinically" dead when all the measured vital signs of life known to medical science have been determined to have ceased. Death is, in this case, the absence of the vital signs of life. When the vital signs of life are no longer measurable, one may consider the person to be dead. A scientific definition for death may be clearer when a definition of life is formulated.⁶

Biblically and theologically, death is contrary to God's plan. The Old Testament understands death as a curse.⁷ The New Testament seems to further develop this concept, while assimilating and synthesizing from its own roots and from outside influences, the survival of the individual after death. The survival of the human being, is, however, tied up in the belief of the meaningfulness of the death of Jesus Christ. So, death as personal annihilation is overcome by Christ's obedience to his death, and ultimately, in his resurrection.⁸

⁵ Louis Bouyer, Dictionary of Theology (Tournai, Belgium: Disclee, 1963), pp. 272-273.

⁶ Rahner, pp. 329-333.

⁷ Bouyer, p. 114.

⁸ Ibid.

C. Resurrection

In a phrase, resurrection is understood as the return of the dead to life. Christian faith understands that the entity of a human being, though dead, lives on, albeit in a changed state.

Continued existence after death, then, is not derived simply from the assumption of the impossibility of death (which is denial), but rather, is understood as the saving act of one who loves and has the power to bestow eternal life.

Humanity no longer faces the prospect of utter dissolution. God know and loves the individual. Continued existence after death, however, is not understood as simple human survival. This existence comes from being in dialogue with the Creator of all life.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ becomes the starting point and the guarantee of resurrection for Christians.⁹

D. Life After Death

Life after death may be understood within the context of this project as the continued conscious existence of the individual after the vital signs of physical life have ceased. In terms of what this project seeks to discuss in particular, there are now claimed evidences of this existence in current medical research, by persons who were resuscitated after having been pronounced clinically dead, and by medical doctors compiling this data who have testified of their belief in a

⁹ Ibid., pp. 388-389.

conscious existence after death.¹⁰

III. WORK PREVIOUSLY DONE IN THE FIELD

Many disciplines have approached the subject of death and dying. The results have been conclusions which sweep the spectrum, from the denial of death to fatalistic depression. In describing the work previously done, I shall attempt to define what has been written from a theological perspective, as this, is, hopefully a work of theology.

John Baillie traces the contemporary problem of skepticism concerning the belief in individual existence after death, and comes to what he calls a "satisfying view". He concludes, "... there has been in the Christian religion, all during its history as deep a tragic sense (concerning death) as ever appeared in the world. It has always given death a vitally important place in its scheme, refusing to regard it as a thing of secondary consequence, whether as a natural ending or as a mere milestone on a longer journey...yet it is not by this note of crisis and tragedy that the Christian spirit has ever allowed itself to be finally dominated, but by the note, precisely, of joy and good cheer. To it, the ultimate fact is not death, but life, not the Cross, but the Resurrection and the Crown. Death has been downed, and the grave robbed of its victory; so that death has no more dominion over us."¹¹ Finally, he states, "We are accordingly faced with the choice between

¹⁰ Nietzsche, p. 22.

¹¹ John Baillie, And the Life Everlasting (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), pp. 284-285.

two remaining alternatives on the one hand, a radical and consequent pessimism, and on the other hand, the hope of everlasting life with God." ¹² Baille does not attempt to prove in any scientific manner, the actuality of individual existence after death. Rather, his work smacks of both offering the plausibility of believing in it in a modern age, and the uniqueness of the hope Christianity offers concerning it.

Paul Tillich, says, "It is our destiny and the destiny of everything in our world, that we must come to an end...we ask anxiously what it means that we have a beginning and an end, that we come from the darkness of the 'not yet' and rush ahead toward the darkness of the 'no more'". ¹³ He approaches the subject by speaking of modes of time. He says, "The mystery of the future and the mystery of the past are united in the mystery of the present...Each of the modes of time has its peculiar mystery, each of them gives its peculiar anxiety. Each of them drives us to the ultimate question...There is one power which surpasses the all consuming power of time---the eternal: He who was and is and is to come, the beginning and the end. He gives us forgiveness for what has passed; He gives us courage for what is to come. He gives us rest in his eternal presence."¹⁴

¹² Ibid., p. 286.

¹³ Herman Fiefel (ed.) The Meaning of Death (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), p. 30.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 4, I include Tillich, not because I consider him to best articulate the Christian faith as a theologian, but because he was included in a discussion of the meaning of death with professionals from other disciplines, by Fiefel.

Robert E. Kavanaugh, a teacher, psychologist, and former priest, has written a starkly candid book entitled Facing Death. Among other issues of death and dying, he has written a chapter entitled "Life Beyond?". He says, "I seem to have at least four heads working inside mine on the question of afterlife...My scientific head views man as only another animal, more advanced cerebrally, perhaps, but as certain to die and decay as any lesser species...On occasion my religious head still works...It can still plunge across the vacuum of convincing evidence, resolving contradictions, needily accepting the dreams and promises of prophets and evangelists...It would be comforting to withdraw into this head again, exclusively...yet I hold back...If ever again I lop off all other heads to think religiously, I want belief to be free choice instead of fear or a habit begun before I could walk or talk... My third head is philosophical, sometimes mystical...Sometimes it seems I can prove by abstract reasoning that man will live forever...of late I conclude my philosophic meditations by reading one of my favorite philosophers, Soren Kierkegaard, 'Honor to learning, and honor to one who can treat the learned question of immortality in a learned way. But the question of immortality is not a learned question. It is a question of the inner existence, a question which the individual must confront by looking into his own soul'...My fourth head is not all head. It is partly heart...My fourth head could more easily accept a godless world without afterlife if staunch advocates of human love found better ways to help...the retarded and the old...I listen disrespectfully to disclaimers of an afterlife, while my fourth head secretly erects a place where all wrongs will be put right. My sense of

justice and fair play necessitates a hereafter." ¹⁵

Joseph Bayly provides a perspective on death from an evangelical Christian view in a book called A View From a Hearse. Though at times the book lends itself to a more traditional or conservative audience, and uses terms that are largely 'in-house' for Evangelicals, Bayly does speak to the Christian hope in an articulate manner. He speaks from a wealth of anguishing human experience in the loss of three sons. He speaks simply, our experience of heaven, according to the Bible, will be in two stages: First, immediately after death, a purely spiritual experience; later a reunion of body with spirit...This reunion of the individual spirit with the body shed at death reconstituted and glorified, will take place at the time of Jesus Christ's second coming to the world." After that confession he adds, "Many questions about death are shrouded in mystery in the Bible...What it does tell us clearly, is that by the death of Jesus Christ on a cross, death itself has been conquered, its bitter sting has been removed, and in a day yet to be, it will be destroyed". ¹⁶

Several professional projects at the School of Theology at Claremont have been written, upon the subject of dying and death. Most are related to the counseling of the dying and bereaved. Jack Grant Preston completed his Masters Thesis in 1963 on grief counseling accord-

¹⁵ Robert E. Kavanaugh, Facing Death (Baltimore: Penquin, 1972), pp. 212-215.

¹⁶ Joseph Bayly, View From a Hearse (Elgin, IL: Cook, 1969), p. 85-86.

ing to the attitude of the counselee regarding life after death.¹⁷

James Stanton completed his Doctor of Ministry project in 1975, on the task of preaching on death.¹⁸ Hendrik Venter wrote this Ph.D.

dissertation on the pastoral care of the terminally-ill patient and the family.¹⁹ Stanley Fix has written a Doctor of Ministry project

on the problem of Christian Funerals in the Light of American Attitudes Toward Death.²⁰ Of all those written, the above four have substance

within their writings that have direct contributions to the theological/ethical perspectives of death and dying in terms of pastoral care upon which I hope to continue.

IV. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Methodologically, this project intends to apply Biblical exegesis and contemporary theological perspectives to ascertain the value of the "life-after-death" research for providing new insights into contemporary theology. It is the projects' intention to contribute some

¹⁷ Jack Grant Preston, "Modifications of Principles of Grief Counseling According to the Attitude of the Counselee Regarding Life After Life," (Unpublished Th.M. thesis, School of Theology at Claremont, 1963).

¹⁸ James M. Stanton, "Preaching on Death: Its Procedures and Possibilities," (Unpublished D.Min. thesis, School of Theology at Claremont, 1975).

¹⁹ Hendrik P. Venter, "Pastoral Care of the Terminally Ill Patient and Family," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, School of Theology at Claremont, 1975).

²⁰ Stanley Newel Fix, "Christian Funerals in Light of American Attitudes Toward Death," (Unpublished D.Min. thesis, School of Theology at Claremont, 1976).

perspectives toward integrating the above evaluation into the pastoral care of the congregation, both in its attitudes and responses to death, dying, and sorrowing as a part of life.

The project will be kept within reasonable limitations in order to accomplish some specificity both in research and conclusion. The scope of Biblical exegesis is limited to understandings of life, death, afterlife, and resurrection. Theological reflection is limited to the reflections of Wolfhart Pannenberg on the doctrine of resurrection in Christological perspectives. Investigation of the "life-after-death" research is limited to the perspectives of Kübler-Ross and Moody though there is a flood of purported "research" on the subject. Though Kübler-Ross has published much upon the subject of death and dying exclusive of "life-after-death" material, this project is limited to the "life-after-death" material. Perspectives on Pastoral care in the congregation will be limited to approaches of conceptualizing and speaking of death forthrightly within the church community, as opposed to presenting techniques for pastoral and congregational care.

V. PROCEDURE FOR INTEGRATION

This project attempts to integrate the disciplines of Ethics and Practical Ministry. Both disciplines are concerned with the manner in which people interact and respond to each other. Implicit within the concern of this project is the manner in which the church views death, dying, and sorrowing within the church.

Certainly the works of the "death and dying" researchers are

being widely-read and accepted by the general public. The discipline of Practical Ministry must be concerned with responding to these works. Certainly this concern has overtones in terms of the ethics of applying theology to this research, and vice versa in the local parish.

VI. CHAPTER DEVELOPMENT

A. Chapter One - Introduction

The Chapter attempts an orientation to the "life-after-death" research of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, and Raymond A. Moody. Methodological discussion follows by suggesting a need for scrutinizing this research in the light of Biblical exegesis and theological reflection is proposed. The need for this is pointed out as obvious in terms of pastoral ministry. Definitions are given for the terms "life", "death", "resurrection", and "life-after-death". A brief summary is given of those who have contributed previous theological reflection on the subject of death and dying. The scope and limitations of this project is delineated. Chapter development is surveyed.

B. Chapter Two - The Life-After-Death Researchers: Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and Raymond Moody

The research of Kübler-Ross and Moody are discussed in detail in this Chapter. Kübler-Ross's research is analyzed first, followed by Moody's. A study in contrasts follows in comparison of their findings, both the similarities and the dissimilarities. Finally, comparisons of the conclusions of each are offered. This Chapter intends

to be analytical only, with no value judgment given of the work of either researcher.

C. Chapter Three - Concepts of Life, Death, Resurrection and Afterlife
In The Old Testament, The Apocalyptic Writings, and
The New Testament.

Here, the attempt to build a base for a theological response to the research commences. The Biblical concepts of death, afterlife, and resurrection are traced in content and development. The Chapter indicates that the concept of subjective afterlife of the individual was a gradual development for the Israelites. Apocalyptic literature is examined as sources of belief in the resurrection. New Testament understandings of life after death are discussed for the most part as the belief in the resurrection within the context of the Apocalyptic expectation.

D. Chapter Four - Resurrection in the Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg

The ultimate aim of this Chapter is to understand Wolfhart Pannenberg's assertions about the doctrine of resurrection. In order to arrive at such an understanding, Pannenberg's unique concept of revelation as history is explored. Secondly, his purpose for developing a theology by beginning with Christology is addressed. Thirdly, the proleptic character to Jesus' claim is integrated, followed by confronting the resurrection of Jesus as a historical problem. Finally, the general resurrection of the dead concludes this chapter. The final two sections of this chapter attempt to show the relationship between

the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the belief in the general resurrection of Jesus Christ and the belief in the general resurrection of the dead in Christian faith. At various points, contributions by Bultmann and Conzelmann are integrated in order to more clearly define Pannenberg's uniqueness in approach.

E. Chapter Five - Conclusion

This chapter makes an attempt to do creative pastoral theology. Theological reflection is offered as a response to the "life-after-death" research of Kübler-Ross and Moody. Pastoral response guidelines are enumerated.

Chapter 2

THE LIFE-AFTER-DEATH RESEARCHERS

ELISABETH KUBLER-ROSS

RAYMOND A. MOODY

I. INTRODUCTION

The two major figures dominating the so-called "life-after-death" are Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a Swiss-born psychiatrist who practices in Flossmoor, Illinois, and Raymond A. Moody, Jr., a former professor of Philosophy, now a Resident in Psychiatry after receiving his medical degree from the University of Georgia Medical School.

Kübler-Ross's research began its current course of direction in 1966 when she began urging her terminal patients to relate to her how they felt about their approaching deaths.¹ In 1968, a patient reported an out-of-the body experience which motivated Kübler-Ross to initiate an investigation of the deathbed experience from a new perspective.² Her work has resulted in a compilation of many reports of experiences similar to the one she first recorded. Today, she travels on an international lecture circuit, propounding her revolutionary views on approaches of caring for the dying person, and elaborating on her contacts with her patients who have reported out-of-the-body experiences. The fees she collects sustain her practice. She refuses

¹ Kenneth L. Woodward, "There is Life After Death", McCall's (August 1976), 97.

² Ibid., p. 136.

financial remuneration for her work among the terminally ill with whom she works exclusively. ³

Though she has written several books on death and dying, Kübler-Ross has not at this time produced any unifying work which systematically records her findings and conclusions concerning her work with patients who have been near death, or who have been pronounced clinically dead. Resources which indicate her findings must be derived for the most part from secondary material or from attending one of her lectures. She refused an interview requested for the benefit of this particular project. Her policy is to spend time with terminally-ill persons or those close to them, during her "free time" at her seminars. ⁴

She has written the Forward, however, to the findings of Moody, who has assembled his research data in a book entitled Life After Life. In her research, Ross indicates that Moody's research corroborates her own with respect to its findings. ⁵

Moody had his first contact in 1965 with someone who related to him a near-death experience. This was, for Moody, the first of many such experiences that he would record. ⁶ He has chosen to compile them in book form. Life After Life has become a popularized best seller.

³ Ibid., p. 136.

⁴ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross Lecture, Brawley, California, April 28, 1977. Information from notes from this lecture are used through this Chapter.

⁵ Raymond A. Moody, Jr., Life After Life (New York: Bantam, 1975), p. viii.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 14-15.

Since the publication of Moody's book and the public statements of Kübler-Ross, many books of lesser significance have appeared.

It will be the task of this chapter to systematically compare and contrast the findings and conclusions of Ross and Moody, including some discussion of the implications of methodology and approach implicit within both researchers' data.

II. THE KUBLER-ROSS RESEARCH

The year 1968 found Kübler-Ross working at the University of Chicago Hospital, giving seminars for doctors, nurses and anyone else in the helping professions. These seminars were constructed in such a manner that persons could listen behind a screen while terminally-ill patients discussed with Ross the fact of their impending death.⁸ These activities led to the publication of her books entitled On Death and Dying (1969), Questions and Answers on Death and Dying (1974) and Death: The Final Stage of Growth (1975)

A. First Reports

One of the patients involved in the seminar related an experience she claimed to have had when her body showed no vital signs of life, that is, no respiration, blood pressure or brain wave activity.⁹

At the time she was apparently dead, the woman claimed to

⁸ Ibid., p. 135.

⁹ Ann Nietzke, "The Miracle of Kübler-Ross," Human Behavior (September 1977), 22.

have felt herself float out of her body and observed the doctors trying to resuscitate her, from a point above them. She recalled looking down, observing her corpse, and noticing how pale she looked. At the same time she began to realize how "wonderful" she felt. She expressed a great sense of peace and relief.

After three hours, and unsuccessful attempts by a medical team to revive her, she recovered and lived for another eighteen months.¹⁰

Since then, hundreds of similar stories have been related to Kübler-Ross, who has assumed the task of "validating" them.¹¹

B. Common Elements

There are certain elements that are common to the experiences of those who have related these accounts to Kübler-Ross. It should be noted that these persons are either in a critical state physically, or in a condition of being clinically dead. She uses only first-hand or "uncontaminated data".¹² Among her recorded experiences she reports the following common elements are evident.

First, the patients express a detachment from their physical bodies.¹³

¹⁰ Kübler-Ross Lecture.

¹¹ Woodward, p. 135.

¹² Kübler-Ross Lecture.

¹³ Woodward, p. 136.

Secondly, patients express a total absence of pain, anxiety, and suffering.¹⁴ More positively state, the person has a sense of peace and relief.¹⁵

Thirdly, there is a sense of wholeness. That is, if the person has had a physical handicap, the person in the out-of-the-body experience does not seem to be limited by the handicap. One man who was injured in an automobile accident claims to have "seen" his corpse with one leg severed. Yet, he had a feeling that his leg was really intact. Another man, who was blind previous to his out-of-the-body experience was able to "see" everything that went on around him. It was later verified that the events he had "seen" had actually taken place.¹⁶

Fourthly, loved ones, or people familiar to the person who have died earlier come to meet the one who is dying or dead. If children have parents who have preceded them in death, they are met by the dead parent.¹⁷ If the children have no one "beyond" who knows them, the person who comes to meet them is a religious figure, often Jesus or Mary.¹⁸

Peter, a two-year-old, was pronounced dead from a drug reaction.

¹⁴ Kübler-Ross lecture. It ought to be noted that when Kübler-Ross relates these common characteristics, she expresses them in a manner which indicates that these "events" happen to all humans when they die. For example, she says, "At the time of death, one will still be aware."

¹⁵ Woodward, p. 136.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 135-36.

¹⁷ Kübler-Ross Lecture.

¹⁸ Woodward, p. 136.

He was later revived, and according to Kübler-Ross, started talking like "an old wise man".¹⁹

"Mommy, I was dead", he said simply. "I was in such a beautiful place with Jesus and Mary". But, he was told he had to go back and "save Mommy from the fire". There was no elaboration on the meaning of the "fire".²⁰

Fifthly, most persons express the sensation of being in a dark mist or tunnel. There is movement toward the other end of the tunnel or mist toward a light.

The light seems to have personal characteristics about it. An evaluation of the person's life takes place in the presence of the light. The life of the person passes in front of her or him, and the person is able to observe every word, action, and deed that has ever occurred in her or his life. From this "Review" the person becomes aware of how her or his life has affected others. There is a feeling that if one is drawn too close to the light, one will never return.²¹

These are the common elements in reports within the Kübler-Ross data from persons who have been near death, or have been pronounced clinically dead.

There may be other characteristics of the experience not available within the sources used for this project. These, however, seem to reflect the most common occurrences, and the most significant ones.

¹⁹ Kübler-Ross Lecture.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

III. THE MOODY RESEARCH

After Moody came in contact with the man who claimed to have had an out-of-the-body experience, he developed a somewhat skeptical, if open attitude. But, by 1972, he had collected a sizable amount of data involving reports of people who had considered themselves to have had out-of-the-body experiences while near death or in a clinically-dead state.²²

Moody's research is much more accessible than is Kübler-Ross', simply because he has placed his material in somewhat codified form, and Kübler-Ross has expressed no desire to do so as yet.²³

A. Methodology

Moody is very clear concerning the conditions under which he collected data. The accounts he incorporated into his data were (a) from people who were pronounced clinically dead, (b) from people who were near death from accidents or severe injury, and (c) from people who reported experiences of other persons they had known. Reports from the last category are not under serious consideration by Moody, since these reports are not considered to be raw material.

Of his accounts of "near-death" and "death" experiences, Moody claims that though they are remarkably similar, no two accounts are identical, that is, no one reports every single detail that every one

²² Moody, p. 14.

²³ Nietzsche, p. 21.

else reports.

Secondly, no one detail of the total of details reported in every experience occurs in every report.

Thirdly, no one certain order of the events within the reported experiences can be ascertained.

Fourthly, those who are diagnosed as "clinically dead" report more intense and complete experiences.

Finally, some clinically dead persons report that they have experienced nothing. Or, if they have had more than one occurrence of being near death, or being clinically dead, they may have experienced an out-of-the-body occurrence one of the times and not another.

He concludes discussing his methodology by admitting that the reports are inherently inaccurate because they are human reports.²⁴

B. The Composite

Moody has created a composite of what he considers a theoretically ideal or "complete" experience of dying, which includes the elements most frequently occurring in the reports within his collected data.²⁵

1. Ineffability. Most persons sense the inability of language to express what has happened to them.

2. Hearing the News. Some hear themselves pronounced dead by a doctor. Some hear themselves talked about after it is assumed they are dead.

²⁴ Moody, pp. 16-24.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 21.

3. Feelings of Peace and Quiet. These emotions are expressed, even in cases of accident or violence.

4. The Noise. Soon after, a loud sound is heard by the person. This may be an unpleasant sound -- sometimes a buzzing or ringing; or it may be a pleasant sound -- sometimes music.

5. The Dark Tunnel. The person has the sensation of being pulled rapidly through space.

6. Out-of-the-Body. The "dead" persons may see their corpses from afar. They are often initially confused and deny it is happening. There is a strong desire on their part to get back to their bodies, but they do not know how. But, often they realize what has happened to them, they do not feel any more concern for their bodies. ²⁶

The majority of persons seem to find themselves in another body, though not a physical one. These weightless new bodies are incapable of communicating with the physical world, they are invisible to physical beings, and lack solidarity. Travel seems to be easy and instantaneous. They do not feel tired. Many report their experiences seem to be timeless. On the other hand, they report that events seem to go faster out of the physical body. ²⁷

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 25-39. The last statement seems to be an interpretive one, one of the very few I find within the careful reporting of Moody. If someone claims to know what has happened to them - that they know they are dead - it is subjective, hence, and interpretation.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 42-49. The last two statements seem to me to be contradicting. If experience seems to be timeless, how can events seem to go faster than within a "normal" time-frame? Again, here is a case of two subjective interpretations of events.

The very act of "experiencing" becomes more meaningful and purposeful. Although this new body can detect no odors or tastes, hearing and vision seem to be enhanced. Many also express that they had a feeling of aloneness from not being able to communicate with physical beings.²⁸

7. Meeting Others. Some persons become aware of other beings in their vicinity. These beings may be familiar, or they may be completely unknown to the "dead" person.²⁹

8. The Being of Light. (a) Initially, the light the person sees on the other end of the tunnel appears to be dim. It gradually increases in brilliance to a degree that is described by some as reaching "unearthly" dimensions. The light does not hurt or dazzle, however. It seems to have warmth and love emanating from it. All persons, Christians, otherwise religious, and non-religious were drawn to the light. The data presented in this paragraph is, according to Moody, invariable in all those who report it happening.

(b) The light being then begins to communicate with the person. This is described in terms of mental communication as opposed to language. As best as can be expressed in human language, the persons report the light to ask, "Are you prepared to die?" "What have you done with your life that is sufficient?" These questions are not judgmental, but socratic in tone, and humor is sometimes interjected by the light-being.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 50-53.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

c. The light-being and the person then begin to view the person's past life. It is described as visual imaging of past events. The images are three-dimensional, moving, and in vibrant color.³⁰

9. The "Border". There is a time or place one reaches when one feels that if he or she does not return at that given moment, one will never be able to return to physical life.³¹

10. Coming Back. Once a person reaches what is described as a certain "depth" of experience, he or she does not want to return.

There is a feeling of being very intimate with the light-being, and it is difficult for persons to leave the light. Some, however feel called back by other persons, by their thoughts and prayers, or by their responsibilities to children, or others dependent upon them. Few remember "re-entry". Most simply "fall asleep" (metaphorically) and "awake" in their physical bodies.³²

Persons experiencing the above-described events, express no doubt whatsoever of its reality. They are evaluated as well-balanced and functional individuals by Moody. He claims they hesitate to mention their experiences because of the beliefs and norms established by society.

They report a change in attitude toward physical life, in terms of the physical in contrast with the mental aspects of life.³³

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 56-73.

³¹ Ibid., p. 73.

³² Ibid., pp. 77-82.

³³ Ibid., pp. 84-91.

IV THE RESEARCH COMPARED AND CONTRASTED

Though many of the reports are expressed differently within the frameworks of the two separate research projects (which, incidentally, were carried out without the knowledge of the other), many of the findings of both K  bler-Ross and Moody show striking similarities.

We shall proceed now to discuss the similarities with the slight variations involved.

A. Similarities in Research Findings

1. Lack of Involvement of the Physical Body. K  bler-Ross's reports speak more in terms of the detachment of the person from the physical body. Moody speaks of "out-of-the-body" experiences in which the person at first wants very much to return to the body, but later develop more detachment after discovering the experience is not limited to the physical body. Both agree that these experiences do occur without the involvement of the physical body.

2. Peaceful Feelings. Both researchers report that persons sensed great feelings of peace, relief, and quiet, even in cases of accident and injury.

3. Meeting of Others. Whereas both researchers report meeting people from the "other side", there are some differences as to the identity of these persons.

The persons are always either loved ones or a religious figure such as Jesus or Mary in the K  bler-Ross research. Moody's patients report meeting persons both familiar and strange to them.

4. The Dark Tunnel. Both researchers reported people feeling pulled through a dark tunnel, though some of Kübler-Ross's patients report their surroundings as resembling more of a mist than a tunnel.

5. The Light-Being. There are only insignificant variations in reporting the meeting with the light-being. All felt drawn to this being because of the warmth and love emanating from it.

6. The Review of One's Life. Though both researchers agree that the review is not a judgmental one, a difference in tone seems to be present in this area of research. Moody's patients find the questionings of the light to be Socratic. Kübler-Ross claims that this review is the judgment so often feared, since those viewing it see how much suffering they have caused other persons.

7. The Point of No Return. Patients of both researchers felt that there was a definite time or space which they could not pass over, or they could not return to physical life. It seems to be a matter of choice for the individual whether he or she would or would not return.

8. The Return. This is common in both researcher's data simply because only those who return to physical life can relate their experiences. Moody does report more of the details of the returning to the body than does Kübler-Ross.

B. Dissimilarities in Research Findings.

1. Sense of Physical Wholeness. Both researchers reported that their patients felt a sense of peace and quiet even in the face of accidental or injurious death. Kübler-Ross accents the aspect of those who have "died" of injury - causing accidents who have a sensation that

their bodies are whole, regardless of the injury. Moody does not mention this.

2. The Noise. Moody mentions the noise heard before or during the "tunnel" experience. Kübler-Ross does not.

The dissimilarities in research findings seem insignificant in comparison with the similarities.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPRESSIONS

The point of departure for Moody from Kübler-Ross in the interpretations and conclusions they make about their collected data.

The similarities recorded heretofore are not as apparent when reading the secondary material concerning Kübler-Ross. She readily places her own interpretations upon data as she presents it. Moody, on the other hand, presents his data before giving what he prefers to call his "impressions" rather than conclusions.

A. Kübler-Ross's Conclusions.

From her research, Kübler-Ross concludes, "I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that there is life after death." ^{35,36} In fact, she states, "Death does not really exist." ³⁷

The rest of the person continues to exist after physical death, she believes. ³⁸

³⁵ Woodward, p. 97.

³⁶ Nietzsche, p. 22.

³⁷ Woodward, p. 97.

³⁸ Kübler-Ross Lecture.

Often criticized for stating such dogmatic conclusions without the verification that many of her colleagues in the scientific community demand in order to make such statements, she responds, "Present-day scientific methods are inadequate for investigating such phenomena as life after death. The research is done. The findings we have, the answers I feel I have - whether this is scientific enough is something I am not concerned about." ³⁹

When pressed by Kenneth Woodward about the above statement, she replied, "I know of no other way to explain how people who have lost all consciousness and show no vital signs can report exactly what is going on around them. My job is to show what I know, not convince or convert. If other scientists or physicians can explain these cases in different terms, then it is up to them to come forward." ⁴⁰

Kübler-Ross's controversy seems to center, however, not so much on the intriguing research she presents, but rather, her conclusion of "knowing" there is life after death, based upon the research she has completed, to date.

1. Criteria. She gives three criteria for her conclusions. Two are based upon visible aspects of the dying person. One is based upon what happens to the "dead" person, as later reported by them.

First of all, Kübler-Ross notes that often people speak to other persons who are not physically visible just before they die. They are apparently lucid, as they also speak to people in physical

³⁹ Nietzsche, p. 21.

⁴⁰ Woodward, p. 136.

bodies in the room with them. Secondly, many people die with a look of peace upon their faces. In Nietzkes' profile, Klübler-Ross seems to have noticed these two criteria early in her current research.⁴¹

In Woodward's article, it is clear that these characteristics were originally noted by her as long as thirty years ago, long before she started work on her well-publicized work.⁴²

Her third criterion seems to be concerned not only with her belief in the objectivity of her research, but also with her concept of justice. It seems relatively safe to state that Ross has not elaborated to date upon the reliability of the events reported in the data given by persons who have "died", with the exception of her comments upon the "review" stage of the data. Her comments upon the reliability of this particular event in the research appears to be based upon her definition of justice.

She concludes that everyone dies a "beautiful death". Both Hitler and Mother Teresa experience death in the same way. But where is the justice in that?⁴³

The justice is in the review that takes place in the presence of the light-being. Here, as the dead person views herself or himself, he or she is forced to evaluate her or his life, and realize where, in the individual's existence, he or she made "lower" choices rather than "higher" choices. One learns lessons about one's self by being made

⁴¹ Nietzke, p. 21.

⁴² Woodward, p. 134.

⁴³ Klübler-Ross Lecture.

totally aware of whatever pain or suffering any of one's actions have caused another human being.

This "is incredibly logical", she insists. "And when you listen to it, it makes you religious in a very genuine sense of the word, because no man could invent such a fair system. To me, this is beautiful." ⁴⁴

Kübler-Ross admits her religious convictions are a result of moral concern rather than theological reflections. She elucidates on this in her latest book, in which she describes her horror concerning the devastating effects of World War II. ⁴⁵

The light-being is God, Kübler-Ross states matter-of-factly. "God is the light and love these people experience. They are entering His presence. That, for me, is beyond the shadow of a doubt." ⁴⁶

2. The Philosophy of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. If survival of death can once again become an accepted fact of life in American Culture, this attitude would have extraordinary effects upon how we prepare for death, Kübler-Ross believes.

"...If people knew the facts as I believe I know them now, they would realize there is retribution for wrongdoing in the next life. They would realize how important it is to say 'I love you'

⁴⁴ Nietzsche, p. 22.

⁴⁵ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, Death: The Final Stage of Growth (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1975), pp. 122-123.

⁴⁶ Woodward, p. 136.

while those around them can still bear the message." ⁴⁷

Two things ultimately count in this life, according to K  bler-Ross they are love, and service to others. ⁴⁸

B. Moody's "Impressions"

In sharp contrast to Ross, Moody hesitates to come to any conclusions resulting from his research. Rather, he takes the approach of mentioning several explanations for the phenomenon from various perspectives and disciplines, critiquing them, and finally, giving some "impressions" concerning his research with some ideas for the future.

1. Explanations.

a. The Supernatural Explanation. Some have criticized this research as demonic. This criticism is more widespread among conservative Christians. If this is so, he challenges, why does the light-being attempt to persuade people to be loving and forgiving? ⁴⁹

b. The Pharmacological Explanation. This evaluation attempts to explain "near death" experiences are caused by therapeutic drugs administered to the person. (The drug "Ketamine" has been known to have induced out-of-the-body experiences.) ⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ K  bler-Ross Lecture.

⁴⁹ Moody, pp. 155-156.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 156.

Moody responds that though there may be a few similarities in the reports of "dead" persons and persons under the influence of drugs, the drug-induced experiences are comparatively, extremely vague. In most cases, no drugs had been administered to those reporting "near death" or death experiences.

A basic assumption of pharmacology is the connection between the drugs administered to a patient and the psychic experiences which seem to follow. Moody claims this assumption is not as universal within this discipline, as is widely conceived.⁵¹

Drugs have been used for centuries for mind-effects. These drugs have been associated with religion and the attainment of enlightenment. Moody presents us here with the possibility that as drugs can be used to reach another state of reality, so the "near-death" reports could be a reality of a different dimension.⁵²

It should be noted here that Klübler-Ross has recently become personally involved in self-induced, out-of-the-body experiences (though apparently not drug-induced) and that she interprets this ability to travel through space without the limitations of the physical body as additional "proof" of the fact that the soul leaves the body at death, and continues to exist after physical death.⁵³

c. The Neurological Explanation. Some representatives from this discipline claim that since oxygen supply to the brain is

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 160-161.

⁵² Ibid., p. 162.

⁵³ Nietzsche, pp. 22-25.

cut off during clinical death and other kinds of bodily stress, the phenomenon must represent some sort of last compensatory gasp of the dying brain.

Moody's critique is that many near-death experiences happened before any physiological stress of the required type took place. Every single element appearing in cases of severe injury can also be seen in other instances in which injury was not involved.⁵⁴

From this perspective one may say that these experiences may be malfunctions of the nervous system of the dying person.

While there are some similarities between neurological seizures and "near-death" experiences in terms of visual images, Moody claims there are some striking differences.

First, memory images in seizure do not come in order or in any sense of unity. Secondly, these images do not seem to be given for any meaningful purposes. Finally, the particular images could not be recalled after the seizure experiences.⁵⁵

d. The Psychological Explanation.

1) Isolation Research. There have been significant studies of what happens to the mind and body of a person who is isolated for protracted periods of time. One woman who was at the North Pole for a considerable amount of time reported seeing a panoramic vision of the events of her life. Other reports of people in protracted isolation

⁵⁴ Moody, p. 163.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 177.

indicate a distortion of time, resistance to "going back" and, feelings of unity with the universe. They often return with profound changes in their values.

Moody states that often patients who have near-death experiences are isolated and in recovery rooms. One could indeed find cases of borderline, that is, either near-death or isolation. On the other hand, one can make the case that there are also experiences which may definitely be termed "near-death" over against isolation.

Isolation, he concludes, may be one other way of entering a state of consciousness ("near-death" or death being another way).⁵⁶

2) Dreams, Hallucinations, and Delusions. This explanation shows these experiences as wish-fulfilling dreams brought into play by numerous factors. Moody is critical of this dimension of the psychological explanation. Victims of "near-death" experiences he claims he has dealt with are emotionally stable.⁵⁷

Finally, Moody gives his thesis that "explanations" are not only abstract intellectual systems, but rather, are projects of egos of persons who hold them. Consequently, Moody says he is not interested in proposing any explanations as such.

"Let us leave open the possibility that 'near-death' experiences represent a novel phenomena for which we may have to devise new modes of explanations and interpretations"⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 170-175.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 176.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 177.

Moody does however, appear sympathetic with the psychological explanation.

2. Impressions. Moody gives no clear-cut feelings concerning particulars in his investigations. He does give some idea as to how he feels about his study as a whole.

a. First, he states this is not a scientific study. For this reason he does not feel he has proved there is life after death.

He does not prefer to use terms such as "conclusion", "evidence" or "proof". These are technical terms. They have more sophisticated meanings than those that are assumed by the average layperson. In logic, what can and cannot be said to follow a given set of premises cannot be casually treated. When one concludes something, one must come to the same sets of conclusions with the same sets of premises.

Unlike Kübler-Ross, Moody does not claim to "know" there is life after death, or to conclude as a result of his studies that death really does not exist. ⁵⁹

b. Secondly, Moody claims the data he has collected is significant. By calling these experiences significant, he means that they should neither be rejected, nor should they be sensationalized as proof of life after death. Rather, he calls for some "middle" way of interpreting them, though he does not elaborate on what that means for this particular study. ⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Nietzsche, p. 22.

c. He conjectures that the inability of this study to construct proof of life after death is due to limitations of current modes of scientific and logical thought rather than deficiencies in the research data or methodology. Historically, logic and scientific methodology are growing dynamic processes. He implies that as they grow they may give room to consider this data.⁶¹

d. In a new book he has written, soon to be published, Moody urges hospital personnel to create procedures which may be implemented for the routine checking out of claims of resuscitated patients who have reported the kinds of experiences related to the currently-collected data.⁶²

e. Describing his personal feelings, Moody confesses that there is something very "persuasive" about listening to the first-hand reports he has collected. He believes the experiences are "real".

He then seems to substantiate what he has already implied in his writings which come down strongly on the side of a psychological explanation. He classifies these experiences as psychological, not logical.⁶³ This is in sharp contrast to Klübler-Ross who finds events within the experience as logical, particularly the idea that the "Review" is a logical method of justice.

Even though the experiences are subjective, there is a need to study them because of the universal concern with the nature of death.

⁶¹ Moody, p. 152.

⁶² Woodward, p. 138.

⁶³ Moody, p. 183.

3. The Philosophy of Raymond A. Moody. Existentially, Moody provides similar philosophy as Kübler-Ross, though with a less dogmatic tone.

"What we learn about death may make an important difference in the way we live our lives."

"We cannot fully understand this life until we catch a glimpse of what lies beyond it." ⁶⁴

Now, to begin to lay the foundation for theological response to this research, we shall proceed by discussing concepts of life, death, and resurrection in terms of the Biblical understandings.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 183-184.

Chapter 3

CONCEPTS OF LIFE, DEATH, RESURRECTION
AND AFTERLIFE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT,
THE APOCALYPTIC WRITINGS, AND THE NEW
TESTAMENT

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT

A. The Hebrew Understanding of Life.

In order to grasp what Old Testament understandings of death are, it is important to determine the conception of life in the Hebrew mind.

There is no unity regarding human nature in the Old Testament. This being the case, there was no felt need for any intentional unification of any anthropological concepts, among them, for our purposes, the idea of what it is in humans that is alive.

The word most often used is *nephesh* in describing what is alive. Seldom does its literal meaning, "throat" or "gullet", apply to the context. It cannot be correctly translated as "soul".¹ If one may speak of a soul at all, one may say that humans have no souls. Rather, they are souls, because God has breathed the breath of life into the first man, who was formed from the dust of the ground.²

¹ Gerhard Von Rad, Old Testament Theology (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), I, 153.

² Rolf Knierim, "The Nature of the Old Testament Spirituality" (unpublished manuscript), p. 6.

The Hebrew simply did not distinguish between the intellectual and vital parts of the body.

Life is not to be understood in abstract terms, but rather as a unit of vital power. For humans, and for animals, on some occasions, the "vital unit of power" is referred to by the term *Nephesh*.³

There are in general terms, three somewhat distinct meanings. The first relates to the principle of life, without any evidence of the psychical side. Secondly, we have the meaning which relates to the psychical side. The third meaning relates to the self, or the personal pronoun.

In terms of the third meaning, *nephesh* refers to the living person in entirety, (Genesis 2:7). The Hebrew person is a unit, the unity being the complex of parts which has no existence apart from the body.⁴

Nephesh dwells in the flesh (Deuteronomy 12:23), though it is clearly distinguished from it (Isaiah 10:18).⁵

Ruah, another term implying aliveness, may be translated as "breath" or "wind". Secondly it may mean "spirit", and in this case, not a spirit, but the spirit in the sense of being spirited. When properly qualified, it may refer to an external spirit affecting

³ Audrey R. Johnson, The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel (Wales: University of Wales Press, 1964), pp. 203.

⁴ Lon H. Sibbermon, "Death in the Hebrew Bible and Apocalyptic Literature," in Listen O. Mills (ed.) Perspectives on Death, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), pp. 15-16.

⁵ Rad, p. 153.

the humans. It may be referred to as the Spirit of God. In its proper understanding, it cannot be equated with *nephesh*.⁶

Ruah may be considered, then as that element of human nature through which the rest of the physis becomes vitalized. Through *ruah*, the humans are enlivened, energized, and moved. Without it, humans drop dead.⁷

On the other hand, *nephesh* feels hunger (Deuteronomy 12:15). It hates (II Samuel 5:8), it feels anger (Judges 18:25), and it loves (Genesis 64:30). It weeps (Jeremiah 13:17), it dies (Numbers 23:10), it departs (Genesis 35:18), and it can come back to the person (I Kings 17:21).⁸

Von Rad claims that "breath of life" in Genesis 2:7, does not have anything to do with human or divine qualities. This is the spirit coming from God, but not the spirit of God.⁹

The frequent Old Testament references to humans as "living beings" rest on the assumption of the absolute dependence of the human life upon the spirit of life given by God. All humans, together with all living creatures, then live from the breath of life given by God. All life is either "spirited" or it is not life.

Life, then in Old Testament concepts, is the basic spiritual reality. It is a mystery, a miracle, to be elevated out of dust above death.¹⁰

⁶ Sibbermon, pp. 17-19.

⁷ Knierim, p. 4.

⁸ Rad, p. 153.

⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁰ Knierim, pp. 7-8

B. Israel's And Her Neighbors' Understandings of Death

In presenting Israel's understandings of death in a comparison with her neighboring nations' understandings, one must start with the presupposition that their cultures influenced each other. Most scholars agree that the preponderance of evidence indicates that Israel was, indeed, influenced by her neighbors, and that she did her sharing on the active side as well as the passive.

Upon beginning this study one must guard against reading modern ideas into the relevant texts of the Old Testament. Israel held highly-comprehensive and complex ideas about death, not easily defined.

1. Concepts of Death. The signs of death were everywhere visible within the realm of the physically-vital world. The properties of weakness, illness, imprisonment, and oppression are death. One so ill as to be handicapped from many functions of life is considered to be in a relative stage of death.¹¹

A definition of what death is and means cannot be isolated into a sterile, neutral, empirical definition. The cult of Jahwism declares that it is Jahweh who has apportioned death for all humans. Death becomes a reality when Jahweh forsakes a person. From there, it is only one step until the elimination of life.

Death also implies uncleanness. In fact, all that has died represents the ultimate in uncleanness (Leviticus 11:24-28; Numbers 9:6). Anyone who touched the dead required special purificatory water

¹¹ Rad, p. 387.

compounded with ashes of a red heifer.

In contrast to Israel, her neighbors the Babylonians in the Gilgamesh Epic declare on Tablet X that "when the gods created mankind, they allotted death to mankind, but life they retained in their keeping..."¹²

In Babylonian thought, through sin, death could be hastened and life could be shortened. Through fear of the gods, sacrifice, the building of a temple, or piety, the hour of death could be postponed.

Although life can be prolonged, no one can escape death. The only exceptions to this were Utnapishtim, his wife, his daughter, and the boatman of the Babylonian Ark legend, a counterpart to the Hebrew legend of Noah. They were rewarded with immortality.¹³

For the Babylonians and Assyrians, the destructive power of death extended even over the gods. In the godrealm, death extended even before the creation of the universe.¹⁴

¹² Alexander Heidel, The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parables (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), p. 138. The Gilgamesh Epic is the longest and most beautiful of the poems discovered in the mounds of the Tigris-Euphrates region which ranks among the literary masterpieces of humankind. Included within it, for our purposes, is the Babylonian account of the Deluge.

The hero in the Epic is Gilgamesh. In search of immortality, Gilgamesh came through many extraordinary feats. But in the end, he had to realize that there is no escape from death. If a demi-god such as Gilgamesh could not obtain immortality, it is certainly futile for mere mortals to aspire to escape death.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 139-141.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 138.

In contrast, the Old Testament God cannot die (Psalm 102:26; Isaiah 40:6-7) all things are transient but God.

The state of the humans before the fall was one of conditional immortality which could have extended into absolute immortality. The first humans were prevented from this however, by being banished from the Garden of Eden.

The Old Testament does not say explicitly that death is God-given or a natural end of life.

In contrast to Babylonian belief, death did not exist before sin, but became punishment through sin.

The humans' days are numbered. Somewhat like their Babylonian neighbors, through godliness life is lengthened. Through sin it is shortened. It is different in that Israel's God Jahweh, was not impressed with outward appearance of sacrifice as were the Babylonian gods, but desired heartfelt worship.

For the Babylonians, failure to bury the dead rendered it impossible for the dead person to gain admission and rest in the underworld. Failure to supply the dead with food caused the person to suffer pangs of hunger in the nether-world.

For the Hebrews, the burial custom was almost always the interment of the body. This custom was granted even to executed criminals. Burial was not, however, considered to be essential to the comfort of the departed. It was, rather, an act of kindness to bury the dead. ¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 149-150, 155, 166.

2. Where are the Dead?. For the Babylonians and Assyrians, the place of the dead was localized within the earth. This was known as the underworld. The Mesopotamians' underworld begins a short distance below the surface of the earth. The grave was either within the confines of the underworld or was a passage to it. The Sumerians called it "Kigal", which being interpreted, is "the great place below". Finally, semitic Babylonia conceptualized "irat Kigalli", or "the bosom or breast of the underworld".

For all of the above primitive peoples, the main entrance was located in the distant West, at the place where they saw the sun descend. Smaller entrances were located at every grave.

After entering the underworld, the dead had to cross the river "Hubur", where a four-handed boatman ferried the dead to the other side of the river. The dead then traveled to a city located in the underworld. This vast City of the Dead was ruled by a goddess who was given various names of different cultures.¹⁷

The Hebrews held concepts of a place for the dead which are both similar and diverse from their neighbors.

The dead went to a place called "Sheol", generally translated as the "Realm of the dead". It had two possible meanings.

First, it could be conceived of as a place. This in a similar belief with Israel's neighbors, was a subterranean spirit world. This realm of disembodied spirits is within the evermost parts of the earth below the sea.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 170-172.

That this realm is below the waters is of utmost interest. It seems related to the Hebrew concept of the universe as having three stories. Heaven, the dwelling place of Jahweh, was regarded as a gigantic stable vault with the waters of the firmament standing over it (Genesis 1:7; Psalm CXIVIII: 4:6). The earth was conceived as a disc "founded upon the pillars" above the waters of chaos underneath (Psalm CIV:5, XXIV:2). These chaotic waters provide the earth with springs and brooks, but just as in one occasion they also destroyed creation so there is the same possibility of this happening again. Israel seems to expect a final insurrection of these uncreated powers against Jahweh. And so it was a world under threat with water.¹⁸ Thus the extreme interest that the Hebrew underworld is under the sea.

The passage to Sheol is not thought to be in the West, as Israel's neighbors believed. While the Babylonians' underworld was ruled by a pantheon of gods of its own, separate from the gods who ruled the physically living on the earth, the Old Testament Sheol was ruled by the same God who governed heaven and earth. (Psalm 139:7-8).¹⁹

Sheol impinges on every side into the land of the living. Israel identifies the wilderness with death and the realm of Sheol. Jahweh apportions death for all people.²⁰

Sheol, then besides a realm, is the state or condition of death itself, over against the idea of a specific place.²¹

¹⁸ Rad, p. 152.

¹⁹ Heidel, pp. 173-177.

²⁰ Rad, p. 388.

²¹ Heidel, pp. 173, 183.

The domain of death, for the Hebrew, reached far into the land of the living. Other things are "death" beside the ceasing of physical activity. Weakness, illness, imprisonment, and oppression are "death" as well. One so ill as to be handicapped from many of the functions of life was said to be in a state of relative death.²²

The earliest Old Testament writings indicate that Sheol is a place for all people who have died. It is simply a receptacle, a hollow place, in the center²³ of the earth (Job 10:22). Later writings, however, show further development of Hebrew thought. Sheol becomes a place only for the wicked in the concept of Gehenna. By the time the Book of Enoch was written, it had become a place of punishment for Gentiles, and a place of reform and discipline for Jews.²⁴

3. The Condition of the Dead. The Mesopotamians believed that when the dead reached the city gate of the underworld, they were met by Nedu, the chief gatekeeper. Nedu then escorted them to the gods Eresklsegal and Anumonoki, who are in the positions of judges of the dead.²⁵

According to the Gilgamesh Epic, Tablet XII, if a man died on the battlefield, the mother and father would support his head for

²² Rad, p. 387.

²³ Heidel, p. 187.

²⁴ Lewis A. Murhead, The Terms of Life and Death in the Old and New Testaments (London: Melrose, 1908), pp. 7, 10.

²⁵ Heidel, pp. 191-193.

comfort upon his entrance into Sheol. If a man had two sons, he was given quarters in a brick structure, where he could eat bread.

(The Hebrew never completely freed himself in an individualistic way from the collective family. The person lives on in the children. To die childless, therefore, was a bad end.) ²⁶

The dead were cut off from God and the rest of humanity. They were not non-existent. They were a pale reflection of life. (Isaiah 14). They are cut off from the world or knowledge of the world (Isaiah 38:18). The person was seen as separate from the body. ²⁷

At a person's death, a saying such as the one found in Job 1:21b might be used, "Jahweh gave and Jahweh has taken away; blessed be the name of Jahweh". This is based on the legal principle that possession (of life, in this case) is by lease or grant. ²⁸

4. Resurrection From the Dead. Although there were various kinds of returns from the subterranean house for the Babylonians and Assyrians, there was a real resurrection of the gods. In the case of human beings, the spirit of the dead could be recalled to the upper world for the purpose of gaining information. It was theoretically possible for the dead to rise. But, there is no evidence that an actual resurrection of a human was believed to have taken place. ²⁹

²⁶ Rad, pp. 389.

²⁷ Muirhead, pp. 8-10.

²⁸ Ernst Sellin, Introduction to the Old Testament (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 65.

²⁹ Heidel, pp. 207-208.

Generally, it is believed by scholars that only two passages in the Old Testament can be singled out with any degree of certainty to be speaking unequivocally of life after death:

Isaiah 26:19: Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust... for the earth shall cast out the dead.

Daniel 12:2: And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³⁰

It is noteworthy here that both passages speak of a resurrection.

When the strong sense of corporate personality began to lose its hold upon Israel, the old answer of Sheol no longer sufficed. The single individual with its own selfconsciousness began to move toward the center of thought.

Scholars date the Isaiah 26:19 passage (the apocalyptic chapters 24-27 are the context of this passage) about 300 B.C. Daniel 12:2 is dated approximately 165 B.C.

Some scholars agree that the individual resurrection concept adds nothing essentially new to the ancient faith. It may simply be that "the resurrection of the dead is only a more physical way of conceiving of the eschatological restoration contained in the Jewish belief itself". ³¹

³⁰ Raymond A. Moody, Life After Life (New York: Bantam, 1975), pp. 111-112.

³¹ Sibbermon, pp. 26-28.

The physical and cosmic aspects of Zoroastrianism may have had some effect upon ethical Judaism. Hell comes into existence over against Heaven. Satan becomes the counterpart of God. At this point in the development of these concepts, resurrection seems to be bestowed only upon the righteous, especially the martyrs. It seems important to recognize here that a physical life is the only life of which the Hebrews could conceive, resurrection of the body would be the only viable response to this problem.³²

There are some earlier indications of conceptualization of individual survival of death. They seem to indicate a hope for, rather than a strong belief in personal survival after death.

There are first of all, stories of the prophets Elijah and Elisha reviving the dead. Does this testify to Hebrew belief in immortality of the human spirit?

Secondly, the Psalmist states a faith that he will awake. (Psalm 17:15).

Finally, Job says, "There is hope for a tree if it is cut down, it will sprout again..." (Job 14:7-14).³³

Von Rad points out that the difference in the Psalms expressions of death is that the Psalmist has a lack of hope of "something beyond" the earth. All that was left to do was to cast ones self entirely upon Jahweh. (Von Rad, here, is not speaking of the Psalm 17:15 text,

³² Ibid., p. 29.

³³ Heidel, pp. 210, 216.

but of Psalm 49:16) ³⁴

The expectation of a general resurrection of the dead, is not indicative of the larger Old Testament thought. This is for Von Rad, a radical change introduced by Apocalyptic. ³⁵

C. Summary

There are some conclusions which we may safely draw concerning Old Testament thought within the boundaries of credible scholarship.

Humans were created for never-ending life. Death was unnatural, and was a result of sin. The realm of the dead was governed by Jahweh the same God who ruled the earth. Jahweh is the giver and the taker of life. In earlier writings, indeed, in most of the span of Old Testament writings, Sheol was the receptacle for all the dead, both righteous and unrighteous. It was a place separate from the living. There was no cult of the dead, and no hope of being reunited with loved ones. As a corporate entity, Israel developed no concept of individual continuation of life after death. Rather, a "shadow" of the person continued in Sheol.

Death is not only the cessation of life, Sheol, the place of the dead, impinges on life in many forms. Death is a cutting off of the individual from Jahweh as well as the world.

The Old Testament understandings of individual survival and resurrection from the dead are a later development, and come under the

³⁴ Rad, p. 389.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 407.

heading of Apocalyptic.

II. APOCALYPTIC CONCEPTS

A. Apocalyptic and the Prophets

Both the Book of Daniel, which has been included in the Old Testament canon, and the Book of Enoch, which has found its place in other literature, are the beginning of a growing body of literature classified as Apocalyptic, in which the concept of the Age to Come is developed in considerable detail.

From 168 B.C., apocalyptic thought becomes a great influence in Judaism, and later shows itself to be strongly influential upon Christianity.³⁶

Apocalyptic writers go one step beyond the prophets. The prophets had a conceptualization of the Last Day as an epoch of earthly history. This age, introduced by a miraculous divine act, would last forever as the Kingdom of God on earth.

This concept becomes too materialistic for the apocalyptic writers. Judea was under the iron rule of Rome. They had been under foreign powers prior to Rome. The Babylonians, the first of foreign conquerors, invaded Judea in 597 B.C. Judean interpretation now understood the earth as totally unfit for human habitation. The heavens, where Jahweh dwells, becomes the scene for the imminent Kingdom of

³⁶ Norman Perrin, The New Testament, An Introduction (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), p. 70.

God. ³⁷

B. Apocalyptic as Interpretation

We have here in Apocalyptic literature a dynamic interpretation between the past and present situations. Within apocalyptic, the text interprets the situation, and the situation interprets the text. The Scriptures do not become formalized and concrete, within the time frame in which they were written, but carry God's message to the day in which they are read. The Word of God moves through history, and the interpretation of the text becomes God's message for the time in which it is interpreted.

The writings of Apocalyptic, then, use the prophet's expectation of the Last Day as their frame of reference. The writings of the First Century B.C., then contemplate a new heaven and a new earth. The government of the Kingdom of God centers itself in the new Jerusalem. ³⁸

C. The Apocalyptic Hope

Jewish Rabbinic literature develops the concept of a temporary Golden Age on the earth (as opposed to the prophet's idea of the Kingdom of God ruling on earth forever). Then, the Kingdom is transferred to Heaven, where the righteous will experience eternal life. ³⁹

³⁷ John Baillie, And the Life Everlasting (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), p. 152.

³⁸ Perrin, p. 71.

³⁹ Baillie, p. 152.

Vital to our research, apocalyptic brings to Judaism an expectation of the resurrection from the dead. (The references Daniel 12:2 and Isaiah 26:19, are discussed in the previous section).

Through a Redeemer figure, God will act to bring both an individual and corporate redemption.⁴⁰ Corporate redemption is a concept of the age of the prophets. Individual redemption is worked out by apocalyptic writers.

D. The Form of the Resurrected.

One of the vital concerns discussed in Apocalyptic writings is the form the resurrected individual would take. Two ideas were developed from this concern. First, resurrection would take the form of spirit, soul, and body; secondly, resurrection would take the form of spirit and soul without the body.

If the body is resurrected, would it be the same body, or would it be changed? If the body is changed, in what way would it be changed? Although the literature reflects a period of some uncertainty, the resurrection of the body eventually won out. The body would be changed, and would wear "garments of glory and light", being made as the body of the angels.⁴¹

Josephus, in his volume The Jewish War, comments that the accepted view of the Pharisees, themselves interpreters of apocalyptic writings, was that the souls of the righteous were believed to "pass

⁴⁰ Perrin, p. 71.

⁴¹ Baillie, p. 152.

into another body" (*metab̄inan ēis eteron s̄oma*). It should be noted here that the concept of resurrection was opposed strenuously by the Sadducees, the Conservative Party of Judaism. It was rejected by them because they believed it smacked of the old ancestor worship, the arch enemy of pure and ancient Jahwism. (Acts 23:8).

From apocalyptic, then, we have 1) the hope of a future period in which a new depth of life would permeate and transfigure society, and 2) the hope that righteous individuals would be raised from the dead to share the blessings of a society in which they would, finally, be at home in the world. The second point offers hope for the consummation of individual life.⁴²

E. Zoroastrian Influence?

There is some discussion among scholars, mentioned briefly in the previous section, concerning the possible effect of Persian Zoroastrianism upon the Jewish apocalyptic. It is noteworthy that the Jewish captivity in Babylonia began in 597 B.C. Six years later, Cyrus captured Babylonia and the Jews came under the rule of the Persians.⁴³

In Zoroastrianism, the souls of all people pass over the Bridge of Separation, three days after death. The righteous pass over the bridge of the House of Song; the wicked pass over to the House of Lies.

Twelve millenium after the creation of the world, a Saviour would appear for the Great Renewal of the World. The righteous dead

⁴² Ibid., p. 153.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 154.

would be united by resurrection to assist in the Great Final Judgment. The Renewal of the World would take place with a flood of molten metal, and be made young again. The adults would become forty years of age, and children would become fifteen years of age.⁴⁴

It is the consensus of scholarship that apocalyptic concepts were a natural outgrowth of prophetic traditions, though the details of Israel's hope may have been filled in by Persian sources.⁴⁵

III. THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. From Apocalyptic Sect to Gentile Mission.

Our approach to studying the New Testament's concepts of resurrection, both Jesus' resurrection and the general resurrection, proceeds on the assumption that Christianity began as an apocalyptic sect within Judaism.⁴⁶

Moving into the Gentile world it took on an emphasis of its own. It became a cult in the world of Hellenistic religiosity. As other cults in Hellenism, Christianity had its myth of the hero within the context of the gospel stories of Jesus. Baptism was its initiation rite. Eucharist was its sacred meal.

It is not that the early Christians borrowed directly from the Greek mystery cults. It is rather that the Christian mission to the Gentiles came to its expression most naturally in a way that was respon-

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 64

⁴⁶Perrin, p. 50.

sive to the needs of its environment. The difference was that the subject in Christianity is an historical person.⁴⁷

The real problem caused by Christian emphasis upon the resurrection of Jesus and the general resurrection of believers was that the Greeks thought more in terms of the immortality of the soul than the resurrection of the body.⁴⁸

B. The Resurrection of Jesus

In Christianity's early period of development, there was apparently no uniform idea of Jesus's resurrection. Scholars have ascertained that two ideas were in circulation with variants in details.

1. Resurrection and Exaltation as Identical Acts. Originally the concepts of the resurrection of Jesus and his ascension into heaven were identical. Jesus went straight from the grave to heaven.⁴⁹ We have this demonstrated for us in Paul's incorporation of an ancient Christ-hymn in I Corinthians 15:3ff. Here we have no mention of ascension as a separate act:

...that Christ died for sins
in accordance with the scriptures,
that he was buried,
and that he was raised on the third day,
in accordance with the scriptures,
and that he appeared to Cephas,
then to the twelve...

⁴⁷ Rudolph Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), I, 295.

⁴⁸ Hans Conzelmann, An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 64.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

2. Resurrection and Exaltation as Separate Acts. The second understanding of Jesus' resurrection was that he first returned to earth from the grave, and ascended only after spending some time with his disciples. This idea understands Jesus' appearance as fundamentally different from the earlier one. In the first concept, Jesus has ascended directly from the grave and must come from heaven from time to time to make his appearances. But in the latter concept, we have a Jesus appearing who is not yet glorified and exalted.

Here there are no agreed details about the time of his ascension. Even in Luke-Acts one may see that the ascension on Easter Day and the ascension after forty days stand side-by-side.⁵⁰

3. The Beginning of Easter Traditions. We have independent narratives within the New Testament concerning the affirmation of the resurrection of Jesus.

a. Stories of the Appearances of Jesus. In I Corinthians 15:3-8, Paul enumerates the appearances of the Risen Lord as the tradition offered them. He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve, then to five hundred others, and to James. Then Paul proceeds to claim that he is the last one to experience an appearance of the Christ.

Further eye-witness claims to seeing Jesus are enumerated in other passages of the New Testament. "...one of these men must become with us as witness to his resurrection." (Acts 1:22). "This Jesus

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 65.

God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses" (Acts 2:32); "but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest" (Acts 10:40).

Within this tradition which was used mostly by the early church as proof of the resurrection of Jesus, was the agreement that the resurrection of Jesus had with the Old Testament scriptures.

Once again, the Christ-hymn quoted by Paul in I Corinthians 15, constantly refers to the resurrection being in accordance with the Old Testament scriptures Luke 24:27 and Acts 2:30 also allude to this idea.⁵¹

b. Stories of the Empty Tomb. The Empty Tomb stories were unknown in the early Kerygma tradition.⁵² Paul shows no knowledge of this tradition in any of his writings.

John Hick states that Paul may have known about the Empty Tomb tradition and thought of them as sound, but not relevant to his purpose. However, he concludes that since he was writing to the Corinthian Church concerning doubts about resurrection, it would make a great deal of sense for Paul to have included these stories as evidence for those who doubted the resurrection.⁵³

There still remains the dispute in modern scholarship concerning the Empty Tomb stories. Some claim that they are equally early, and compete with the appearances. In this case they would really be Assump-

⁵¹ Bultmann, I, 295.

⁵² Conzelmann, p. 67.

⁵³ John Hick, Death and Eternal Life (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 175.

tion stories and presuppose that Jesus was already in heaven. Still others come down on the side that the stories simply connote late and apocalyptic constructions of the early church.

4. The Meaning of Jesus' Resurrection

a. Earliest Views. Originally Jesus' resurrection coincides with his exaltation. ⁵⁵

Bultmann states that belief in the Messiahship of Jesus may have arisen from the disciples' belief in his resurrection. Romans 1:3-4 seems to indicate that in the earliest church, belief in Jesus' Messiahship dated from his resurrection.

The gospel concerning his Son who
was descended from David
according to the flesh,
and designated Son of God in power
according to the Spirit of holiness by his
resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ
our Lord...

Bultmann sees indications that Jesus functioned as Messiah during his life, but that his Messiahship was hidden until after his resurrection. All that went before is now seen in a new light. ⁵⁶

secondly, the early community seemed to think of Jesus' resurrection as the anticipation of the *Parousia*, and of his ascension as a temporary absence. ⁵⁷ (*Parousia* is often translated as "return". It is more accurately translated as "arrival" or "advent".) ⁵⁸ The

⁵⁵Bultmann, I, 82.

⁵⁷Conzelmann, p. 68.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 26-32.

⁵⁸Bultmann, I, 29.

resurrection, then, brings the *Parousia* into view.⁵⁹

Thirdly the idea of the exaltation of Christ gave the early community hope. It could now think of itself as an eschatological community and give itself security as such.

Fourthly, at the heart of the Gospel is the conviction that Jesus lives as the exalted Lord, and that all may find salvation through him.⁶⁰ The proclamation of his Lordship produces the demonstration of the truth that the gospel is preached to the poor and they are given forgiveness.⁶¹

b. Historicity of Early Views. Easter faith was undoubtedly the most potent factor in stimulating the early church. All historians and scholars are in agreement that the early church came to the conclusion that Jesus had been raised from the dead, by whatever means.⁶² Something real and impressive happened to the community to put them in one place together.⁶³ What historians cannot infer is that the New Testament message of the resurrection is historical event. What historians can infer is the Easter faith of the disciples. For if the resurrection of Jesus is claimed to historical fact, it cannot be the foundation of faith. The only "proof" is the Easter faith of

⁵⁹ Conzelmann, p. 68.

⁶⁰ Hick, p. 177.

⁶¹ Conzelmann, p. 68.

⁶² Russell Aldwinckle, Death in the Secular City (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 53.

⁶³ Hick, p. 171.

the disciples. ⁶⁴

The only thing of which we may be positive is that certain disciples believed that they had seen him after his death. What we are not free to do is to jump from that faith to the historical certainty that the disciples' interpretation is a correct one. Though some may have claimed to have seen Jesus after the resurrection, no one actually claimed to see the resurrection itself. And an empty tomb certainly does not prove either the resurrection of Jesus or his survival after death. ⁶⁵

c. The Apocalyptic Thread. Hick points out here that Jesus' manifestation of himself to the disciples was thought of as a resurrection because this belief was an accepted category of religious thinking within the time-frame of the New Testament. The Pharisees affirmed the doctrine of future resurrection. Jesus' original disciples were not of the Sadducees (the aristocratic Jews who did not believe in resurrection), but were of the same persuasion as the Pharisees. ⁶⁶ It can also be noted here that Paul was a strict Pharisee before his conversion. It would be inevitable that resurrection would be the category in which Paul would understand both the testimony of the tradition, and of his own "appearance" experience. ⁶⁷ He holds fast to the apocalyptic thread of belief in resurrection which we have so

⁶⁵ Aldwinckle, p. 54.

⁶⁶ Hick, p. 178.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 179.

far traced in this chapter, and also retains the apocalyptic expectation of last judgment, and a cosmic drama which will end the old world and will introduce the new world of salvation. ⁶⁸

d. Future Resurrection. The most significant meaning of the resurrection of Jesus for our purposes here is the belief in the resurrection of the dead.

It has been noted that Jesus shared the general hope of Pharasaic Judaism which believed that the eschatological clock is about to strike the final hour. ("The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel." Mark 1:15.) ⁶⁹

After Jesus' death and resurrection, the early community expected the imminent Day of the Lord. Jesus would come again in glory as the Son of Man. This would also mean the moment of the resurrection of the dead. ⁷⁰

C. The Resurrection of the Dead

The belief in resurrection of Jesus, then, forms the basis for the hope of resurrection of believers. As Christ was raised from the dead, so also will believers be raised. Because Christ was raised, therefore the believers will be raised. ⁷¹

⁶⁸ Bultmann, I, 346.

⁶⁹ Hick, p. 184.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 185.

⁷¹ Conzelmann, p. 69.

1. Earliest Views. As Christianity made its way into Hellenistic society, it met serious resistance. Greek concepts pointed more in the direction of the immortality of the soul as opposed to the resurrection.⁷² (It must be noted here, however, that only Greek philosophers believed in a bodiless mind. Primitive Greeks and Romans believed, as did earlier Hebrews, in a second shadowy substance of the self living on.)⁷³

The Hellenistic religious enthusiast declared a belief of already sharing in the resurrection of the Risen Lord. That is, the enthusiast expected no further resurrection in the future. The New Testament opposed this thinking vigorously.⁷⁴

The New Testament presents a diversity of thought within the ambiguous framework of belief in the resurrection, ranging from cruder and more popularly comprehensible ideas of the rising of the just to a renewed existence which belongs to the future history of this world, to notions of life in spiritual bodies in a new environment which is altogether other than this earth, conceived of in glorified terms.⁷⁵

Early Christians expected a general resurrection with most continuing to think of it in terms of a physical one. Although Jesus had taught them that only God knew the day and hour of his return (Mark 9:11; Matthew 16:28; 24:50; I Thessalonians 5:2-3), the first

⁷² Perrin, pp. 55, 104.

⁷³ Hick, p. 190.

⁷⁴ Perrin, pp. 95-96.

⁷⁵ Hick, p. 190.

generation of Christians expected his return in their lifetimes.

In the interval the prophets and saints of old, and recently-slain Christian martyrs were thought of as lying asleep in Hades. Some were in Limbo between Heaven and Hades. Others were already experiencing bliss or torment after individual judgment which would be ratified at the Judgment (Luke 16:22-23; 23-43; Philippians 1:23).

There are significant differences in the manner in which resurrection would take place. Some passages indicate only those who believe in Jesus will be raised (Luke 20:35; 14:14), while others suggest all people are to be raised (Acts 24:15; John 5:28-29). Most of these indicate Messiah would rule thereafter in glory in Jerusalem during the last phase of earthly history.⁷⁶

2. Paul's Views. While many probably believed in the resurrection of a corpse, the only deliberate teaching to be found within the New Testament (apart from Jesus' words to the Sadducees) is in I Corinthians 15. Paul distinguishes here between the natural or animal body (*sōma pseukikon*) and the spiritual body (*sōma pneumatikon*).⁷⁷ It is important here to understand that Paul was opposed to the Hellenistic thought of a naked soul. Paul cannot conceive of existence after death without *sōma*.⁷⁸ Paul longs not to be rid of his body, as did the Greek philosophers. He desired to be blessed with a heavenly one.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 187-188.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 185.

⁷⁸ Bultmann, I, 192.

⁷⁹ Baillie, p. 24.

So we may trace the thread of development from the traditional view of a transformed earthly body in which the corpse will be changed in the process along with the environment to a more contemporary view of a new heavenly body which is a new and different body given by God, but still expressing the same person.

In terms of the latter view, the earthly person perishes because the physical body is a part of the physical world which is fallen and dying. But God raises up a person who is the same and yet different, because this new life is the life of a new body in a new environment.⁸⁰

Bultmann's understanding of Paul's teaching concerning the resurrection is that since flesh and blood have no part in it, the *pneuma* is mythologically substituted. But human existence for Paul is *sōmatic* existence. (*Soma* as form or shape is not Pauline, however.)

Sōma is the human. *Sarx* (death) is that power which lays claim to the human.⁸¹

Building on Bultmann we continue with Conzelmann's understanding of Paul's views based on II Corinthians 5:1-10.

Paul answers the Hellenistic religious enthusiast and the proto-Gnostic whose ideal is incorporeal existence in the light-world. When the body is taken away, the soul is naked and free. (This corresponds with earlier Greek philosophers.)

He answers them by taking over their mode of expression. We

⁸⁰ Hick, pp. 185-185.

⁸¹ Bultmann, I, 198, 201.

shall not be naked. Our heavenly body awaits us. The body is not evil. Sin is evil. So, the contrast is not between matter and spirit, but rather between this world of death and the New Creation. Paul is uninterested in anthropological or metaphysical conditions. This is irrelevant to salvation. What matters is whether we please God.⁸²

Continuing with Paul's thought, but, we stress again that Paul maintains the futurity of the resurrection. We shall not escape death. Death itself shall be destroyed. In fact death has no more power today against the new life in the Spirit.⁸³ Possessing the Spirit gives certainty of resurrection and eternal life (Romans 8:10, Galatians 6:8).⁸⁴

Death is not harmless. It is still the last enemy. It becomes harmless "in Christ". We overcome death in the paradox that we are exposed to it (Romans 8:35ff; II Corinthians 4:7ff).⁸⁵

Death is settled for us. We have died with Christ. Physically death cannot destroy our fellowship with Christ. Though death annihilates us, those who have died with Christ will be raised to eternal life. Hope for life is found in the resurrection of Christ through which we have the certainty of our own resurrection.⁸⁶

⁸² Conzelmann, p. 190.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 188.

⁸⁴ Bultmann, I, 157.

⁸⁵ Conzelmann, p. 188.

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 280, 282.

Humanity is made inherently mortal, from the dust of the earth. It can have no life beyond the blank wall of death unless God wills to recreate on the other side of death by a miracle of divine power. Only faith in the gracious goodness of God gives hope beyond the grave.⁸⁷ During earthly life, being delivered over to death, and freedom from death coincide. Their unity by no means realizes itself only in occasional experiences. Rather, it is everyday reality. (Philippians 4:11-13).

Paul answers the question of how the dead are raised with the comparison of a seed (I Corinthians 15:35-38). It is important to understand that Paul is not thinking in biological-organic terms. The stress is not on the fact that the seed is naked. Rather, the future being of the seed is the wonder which is lifted up here as a paradigm. Resurrection is not continuity but the act of new creation.⁸⁸

The resurrection is historical event for Paul. He cannot know the modern theoretical distinction between historical and supra-historical categories. The theological proof of the resurrection is the proof of the spirit and the power.⁸⁹

So, life is already here. Christ's resurrection is not conceived of as a case of rising from the dead, but as the origin of the resurrection life of all believers which precedes from it, and can hence be regarded as already possible.

⁸⁷ Hick, p. 180.

⁸⁸ Conzelmann, p. 188.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 204.

Life beyond death in terms of resurrection is a future yet to come. Yet, paradoxically, life is already bestowed upon the "right wised" (Romans 5:1-11).⁹⁰

In order to understand ancient concepts in modern times, some reframing must take place. This is accomplished by doing theology. We shall attempt, from this point, to reframe these concepts by implementing Pannenberg's theological thought concerning resurrection.

⁹⁰ Ibid., Bultmann, I, 347-348.

Chapter 4

RESURRECTION IN THE THEOLOGY
OF WOLFHART PANNENBERG

I. THE SELF-REVELATION OF GOD IN HISTORY

In order to better grasp Pannenberg's position on resurrection, both the raising of Jesus Christ, and the general resurrection of the dead, it is crucial to comprehend his case for the revelation of God understood in the context of history.

A. The Enlightenment as a Point of Departure.

The destruction of the old concept of revelation of seventeenth century dogmatics came with the Enlightenment. This idea conceptualized the identification of revelation and the inspiration of the Holy Scripture in terms of the transmission of supernatural and hidden truths.¹

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, the suspicion that supranaturalism is superstition, prevailed. The concept of revelation could only be rescued from oblivion, by reducing its content to God's self-revelation.²

B. The Possibilities for Revelation.

Pannenberg proceeds then to build upon this premise of revela-

¹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, Revelation as History (London: Macmillan, 1968), p.4.

² Ibid.

tion as God's self revelation. "While the creaturely media through which God is perceptible do manifest him, and while the activities that emanate from him do refer back to their originator, they are still diverse. In any case, there are many 'revelations'".³

He sees the possibilities for the self revelation of God in two theological perspectives already propounded by earlier theologians.

First, he sees revelation as the direct transference of divine power through a medium that is distinct from God. This idea is introduced by Schelling, and developed further by Troeltsch and Tillich.

Secondly, there is the possibility of revelation as the indirect self-authentication by God or the basis of God's activity. This is found in the works of Paul Althaus and Emil Brunner.⁴

C. Biblical Confirmation of God's Self-Revelation.

If the whole concept of self-revelation is to be justified, then it must be confirmed on the basis of biblical witness, Pannenberg asserts. He notes that while there is no actual terminological usage for self-revelation of God in the Biblical writings, God continually reveals something or someone, but never precisely God's self.⁵

"Manifestations" of God are understood here as any appearance which does not involve disclosure of the essence of God. In the

³ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴ Ibid.,

⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

oldest Israelite traditions, the appearance of God did not in any way reveal God's essence. These would be manifestations of God.⁶

1. The Announcement of the Name. Barth and Vogel both have concluded that the announcement of the name of Jahweh to the Israelites is a direct self-revelation.

Pannenberg insists that the significance of the name-giving in Exodus is not that the essence of God will be known to the Israelites, but that now, the Israelite can appeal to God by means of this name.

2. "The Word of God". Modern personalistic theology has given a meaning to "the Word of God" that he believes is not the Biblical traditions.

In Israel, the word spoken or authorized by Jahweh had concrete contents distinct from God. This word never had God as its content in any unmediated way.

When the New Testament author speaks of the Word of God, he has in mind the Apostolic Kerygma. This is an entity whose content is clearly distinct from God. The New Testament, then, does not include the idea of direct self-revelation of God.⁷

D. The Indirectness of Revelation in Biblical Tradition.

What emerges for Pannenberg, then, is the concept of the indirect self-revelation of God as a reflex of God's activity in history.

Direct communication, he says, transmits content without a

⁶ Ibid., p. 9.

⁷ Ibid., p. 9-10.

break from sender to receiver. This concept was behind the old orthodox theories of inspiration.

On the other hand, the direct path is broken in indirect communication. The content first reveals its actual meaning by being considered from another level, a higher one. While it always has direct communication as its basis, it takes it into a new perspective. Though God is not the content in any direct manner, every activity and act of God can indirectly express something about God.

Schliermacher's assertion that history as totality is God's revelation is objected to by Pannenberg on two counts. First, if only in its totality history is God's revelation, how can a specific event within it, such as the fate of Jesus, have any absolute meaning as revelation? Secondly, if history is to be the totality of revelation, it appears there is further progress that must be made beyond Jesus Christ about God's becoming manifest.

E. Theses on Doctrine of Revelation.

From here we shall proceed directly to Pannenberg's seven theses on revelation. Space does not permit an extensive construction either of the path which leads him to these, or of the details of each thesis. We shall enumerate them for background purposes.

1. Thesis One. The self revelation of God in the Biblical witness is not of a direct type in the sense of a theophany, but is indirect, and brought about by means of the historical acts of God.⁹

⁹ Ibid., p. 125.

2. Thesis Two. Revelation is not completely comprehended in the beginning, but at the end of the revealing history.¹⁰

This is to be understood not as a retraction of his objection to Schliermacher's assertion that history as totality is God's revelation. It is rather, that revelation is not completely comprehended until the end of revealing history. The end of "revealing history" seems here to be a further qualification upon the idea of the end of history.

3. Thesis Three. In distinction from special manifestations of the deity, the historical revelation is open to anyone who has eyes to see. It has universal character.¹¹

4. Thesis Four. The universal revelation of the deity of God is not yet realized in the history of Israel, but first in the fate of Jesus of Nazareth, insofar as the end of all events is anticipated in his fate.¹²

5. Thesis Five. The Christ event does not reveal the deity of the God of Israel as an isolated event, but rather, insofar as it is a part of the history of God with Israel.¹³

Continuity here is provided by the assertion that the God whom Jesus called "Father" is the God of the Old Testament.

This thesis is crucial for later theological development of

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 131.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 135.

¹² Ibid., p. 139.

¹³ Ibid., p. 145.

Pannenberg's thought. Here he understands that as the Church moved further away from the position of a sect within Judaism to a mission to the Gentiles it had to confront the Greek philosophy of immortality of the soul, over against its own proclamation of the resurrection within the Kerygma. The Church largely failed in this task, he believes, in that in the history of theology the concept of immortality has largely overshadowed the hope for the resurrection. More will be said about this later.

6. Thesis Six. In the formulation of the non-Jewish conception of revelation in the Gentile Christian Church, the universality of the eschatological self-vindication of God in the fate of Jesus Christ comes to actual expression. ¹⁴

7. Thesis Seven. The Word relates itself to revelation as foretelling, forthtelling, and report.

The Word here is not to be misunderstood as the Gnostic understanding of direct divine self-revelation. Rather, Pannenberg understands the Word as "God's manifold and many-pronged involvement in the concrete execution of the history of his revelation by means of his authorized Word."

The Word is foretelling, because the prophetic word precedes the act of history, and these acts are understandable as acts of Jahweh only because a statement coming in the name of Jahweh interpretes them this way.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 149.

The word is forthtelling because Israelite law presupposed knowledge of the deity of Jahweh. In the New Testament Jesus' authority is presupposed. Law, Commandment, and Gospel, then follow as a result of divine self-vindication.

The word is report, or kerygma, as developed in the New Testament, in that it comes from the eschatological revelation of God. This is the apostolic proclamation set in motion through the appearances of Jesus. The kerygma is to be understood solely on the basis of its content, on the basis of the event it reports. It is not to be thought of as bringing something to the event.

So the proclamation of the church does not have the character of a special revelation word. The sermon, then, is a report of the revealing history, and the explication of the language of fact, implicit in this history. As a report of history, then, it breaks into every situation as call and consolation.¹⁵

From these theses, then, especially Thesis Four, it is understandable that from this understanding of the self-revelation of God in history through Jesus Christ, that he proceeds to develop his system of theology with his Christology before going on to examine the significance of his reflections on resurrection.

II. CHRISTOLOGY AS THE STARTING POINT.

When speaking of Jesus Christ today in terms of modern Christology, one must ask whether it has to do with the Jesus of time-past or

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 152-155.

with the Jesus who is present today. That is, do we seek to understand our present proclamation of who Jesus is in terms of what happened at the time, or only in the light of what proclamation says about it today? Further, must Christology begin with Jesus himself, or with the Kerygma of his community? ¹⁶

A. Behind the Biblical Traditions and Apostolic Kerygma.

The personal effect of the historical Jesus, Pannenberg reasons, radiated outward into varied defined historical situations. To the varied intellectual situations of their cultures. And to the questions which moved their times, the early Christians addressed their confessions of Christ. This is the basis, then, for the New Testament diversity with respect to their accounts of Jesus. From this, we may conclude that the Biblical Christ is not the historical Christ.

One can, and must, then get back to Jesus himself from the witness of the apostles by recognizing and making allowances for the relation of the New Testament texts to their respective situations. It is possible, then to distinguish Jesus and his message from the New Testament perspectives. It is not possible to use the Gospel sequences as chronology of the life and ministry of Jesus. ¹⁷ "The sequence in which the gospels report the events of Jesus' ministry

¹⁶ Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jesus-God and Man (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), pp. 21-22.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

has no biographical value. On the contrary, the individual units of tradition have been put together in a quite different order by the various evangelists, an order determined by their particular and differing theological viewpoints." ¹⁸

The historical reconstruction of the figure and proclamation of Jesus is always required to explain how the early Christian proclamation of Christ could emerge from the fate of Jesus. So, going behind the apostolic Kerygma to the historical Jesus is not only possible, it is necessary. ¹⁹ "It is so important for Christianity to achieve the utmost possible degree of knowledge about Jesus, because this is the only way of protecting the believer from the danger that something may be proclaimed and believed as being the message of Christ which may perhaps have little or nothing to do with Jesus himself." ²⁰

The question which remains for us then, is what is really the decisive factor in Jesus' life and proclamation upon which faith is based?

To answer this question, one must get behind the New Testament. This is the only way possible to see the unity that binds together the New Testament witnesses. Comparing the accounts only makes us more aware of the antitheses among them. The inner unity can be visible only when they are taken as an historical source.

¹⁸ Wolfhart Pannenberg, The Apostle's Creed (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), pp. 49-50.

¹⁹ Pannenberg, Jesus-God and Man, p. 23.

²⁰ Pannenberg, The Apostles Creed, p. 48.

B. The Historical Jesus and the Christ of God.

Pannenberg then proceeds to build a rationale for this statement by tracing theological development from Schliermacher to whom the use of contemporary Christian experience as a point of departure for theology may be attributed. Bultmann's claim is that Jesus Christ is present in the Kerygma. Althaus said that faith does not have to do with what Jesus was, but rather, with what he is as he encounters us in the proclamation.²¹

Pannenberg responds that the knowledge that Jesus not only lived in the past, but is alive today as the Risen Lord is not achieved through present-day experiences with the exalted Lord. When saying such things as "the Kyrios reveals himself in the Easter meal," or "Worship is in the Easter Event" how can one distinguish such experiences from self delusion? Since the New Testament testifies that through his exaltation, Jesus has been removed from the earth and his disciples, only on the basis of what happened in the past can we know Jesus lives as the exalted Lord.

Only in trust in the reliability of the report of Jesus' resurrection and exaltation are we able to turn in prayer to the exalted Living One, and thus associate him in the present. In the New Testament eschatological message, the presence of Christ is promised only for the end time.

²¹ Pannenberg, Jesus-God and Man, pp. 24-26.

Christology, therefore, is concerned not only with the unfolding of the Christian confession of Christ, but more importantly with grounding it in the activity and fate of Jesus in the past.²²

The confession of Christ must be grounded then, by Christology. Dogmatic theology, then, must go behind the New Testament, to the base to which it points, and which supports faith in Jesus, that is, to the history of Jesus. Christology, then, has to ask and show the extent to which this history substantiates faith in Jesus.

The task of Christology then, is to establish the true understanding of Jesus' significance from his history, which can be described comprehensively by saying that in this man Jesus, God is revealed. Christology should show that Jesus is no other than the Christ of God. It is a process in the history of traditions, that is, the task of understanding how this man is God.²³

Pannenberg then, approaches Christology, methodologically "from below". It must begin with the man Jesus. The first question in Christology must be about Jesus' unity with God. It does not begin with some preliminary aspects of deeds or words, or effect on persons, but with his relation to God, as expressed in the whole of his activity on earth.²⁴

²² Ibid., pp. 27-28.

²³ Ibid., pp. 29-31.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 33, 36.

III. THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

A. The Proleptic Structure in Jesus' Claim.

The historical Jesus thought and spoke within the context of apocalyptic expectations. There is a remarkable tension between the futurity of the end of the world, and the presence of the final decision in the person of Jesus. This tension definitely leaves room for the question of the verification of Jesus' claim. This is a key to Pannenberg's Christology and his case for the resurrection. Jesus' claim means an anticipation of a confirmation that is to be expected only in the future.

This can be illustrated in Jesus' saying from Q, also found in Luke 12:8f, "And I tell you everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of man will also acknowledge before the angels of God." Jesus distinguishes here between the Son of Man and himself. After Easter such a distinction between Jesus and the Judge at the end of the age would no longer be formulated. Matthew 10:32f corresponds with the above Lucan text. It shows how post-Easter community understood and transformed sayings of Jesus. Here we see the substitution of "I" for the "Son of Man".

Jesus' claim to authority through its proleptic structure corresponds to the apocalyptic visions' relation to history, which in turn goes back in relationship of the prophetic Word of God to the future. ²⁵

²⁵Ibid., pp. 58-61, 63.

Although Jesus' message follows the prophetic and apocalyptic traditions, when one compares Jesus' activity in comparison with the apocalyptic visionaries, there are some profound differences.

First, he does not hide his person under a pseudonym. He is conscious that he brings something new to the situation. Secondly, Jesus had expected the end to be so close, that he no longer described the path to it, but in view of it, issued a call to repentance. Thirdly, in Jesus' activity, eschatological salvation had already made its appearance. Finally, with Jesus, the end is not only seen in advance, it has happened in advance.

When Jesus is asked for a sign, he rejects this demand. Although he does answer John the Baptists' question, "Are you he that should come, or do we look for another", it is not known if Jesus' answer in the Gospels is in its original context. The meaning of his answer to the Baptist's question is that the saving deeds of the end-time are happening under Jesus' hands. They show who he is.

But, the deeds could authenticate his claim only to a certain extent. They could not show unambiguously that Jesus was personally the one in whom salvation and judgment are ultimately decided. It was Jesus' claim that survival or destruction is the coming judgment by the Son of man could be decided on the basis of one's relationship to him. This claim could only be shown to be true when the general resurrection occurred and the judgment of the Son of man took place. Jesus could not, of course, give this sign. The whole of Jesus' work remained aimed at the future confirmation of Jesus' claim by God is held open by temporal difference between the beginning of God's rule

present in Jesus' activity, and its fulfillment with the coming of the Son of man.²⁶

Jesus must have seen death as a possibility, though not in the sense of the prediction of the passion in the Gospels. He reckoned that the end of the world was imminent, followed by the resurrection of the dead, and the judgment of the Son of man. Measured by the seeming nearness of these events, it must have seemed secondary to Jesus whether or not he suffered death before the end came.²⁷

In summary, then, Jesus' claim to authority taken by itself does not justify faith in him. The pre-Easter Jesus' claim to authority stands from the beginning in relationship to the question of the future verification of his message through the occurrence of future judgment of the Son of man according to the attitude taken toward Jesus. This is the proleptic structure of Jesus' claim to authority. Everything depends upon the connection between Jesus' claim and its confirmation by God.²⁸

B. The Significance of Jesus' Resurrection.

Up until now, in order to understand how Pannenberg arrives where he does, we have not compared or contrasted his thought to other theologians, except for tracing the historical roots of it in

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 61, 63-65.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 65.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 66.

the context of earlier philosophers and theologians.

We now have reached the crucial point of our questions on resurrection and life after death. In order to place Pannenberg's thought into greater focus, and in context, we shall at some points discuss it in comparison with Rudolph Bultmann and Hans Conzelmann.

1. The Primitive Church's Confrontation with Jesus' Resur-

rection. The earthly Jesus' expectation was not directed toward a privately-experienced resurrection from the dead. He, rather, expected the imminent universal resurrection from the dead. This, of course, would include himself.

When the disciples were confronted by the resurrected Jesus, they understood this as the beginning of the universal resurrection of the dead. This was, for them, the beginning of the events of the end of history.

For Jesus' contemporaries, the event did not have to be interpreted. It spoke for itself. If such a thing had happened one could no longer doubt what it meant.²⁹

Bultmann sees the church not confronted with the resurrection of Jesus. The church, rather, was confronted with the scandal of the cross. The cross rendered questionable Jesus' claim to be God's messenger bringing the last decisive word. The church had to surmount the scandal of the cross, and it did it in the rise of Easter faith. This faith made available a way of understanding the cross which would surmount and transform the scandal of the curse which had befallen the

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 66-67.

crucified Jesus.

So here we definitely have, in Bultmann's thought, an interpretation by the primitive community. So the resurrection of Jesus, for Bultmann, becomes an interpretation of the cross. Now the cross makes sense within the salvation process.³⁰

For Pannenberg, this simply does not fit into the context of eschatological context within which Israel lived, and to which the early Christian church was orientated.

For Jesus' contemporaries, several things about Jesus' resurrection were obvious to them within their milieu.

First of all, if Jesus has been raised, then the end of the world has begun. The universal resurrection and judgment are imminent. Secondly, if Jesus has been raised, this, for a Jew, can only mean that God has confirmed the pre-Easter activity of Jesus. Thirdly, through his resurrection, Jesus moved so close in identity to the Son of man that the insight became obvious: the Son of man is none other than the man Jesus who will come again. Fourthly, if Jesus is ascended to God, and if thereby the end of the world has begun, then God is ultimately revealed in Jesus. Translated into Hellenistic terminology, in Jesus, God has appeared on earth. The Logos has been among us as a man in the figure of Jesus.³¹

³⁰ Rudolph Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), I, 44-46.

³¹ Pannenberg, Jesus-God and Man, pp. 67-69.

Finally, transition to the Gentile mission is motivated by eschatological resurrection of Jesus as resurrection of the crucified one. Israel's prophets expected the self-demonstration of the Messiah as an event that would take place before the eyes of all the people. In post-exilic Judaism, the hope remained alive that the nations would be involved in Israel's eschatological future. It was clear to the Early Church that the beginning of the end in Jesus' resurrection signified inclusion of Gentiles into eschatological salvation only for those who with Jesus followed the universalistic line of Israel's tradition. ³²

Bultmann here is not in sharp disagreement with Pannenberg, though there are contrasts in approach and conclusion. For Bultmann, so long as the resurrection of Jesus remained simply a proof of Jesus' exaltation to the Son of man, it would still be a Jewish sect, not the Christian church. Through the resurrection, constructed by the early church as an interpretation of the cross, Jesus' coming was considered an eschatological occurrence. Easter faith, then proclaims that God has made the prophet and teacher Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, the Christ of God. ³³

2. The Lord of All Nations. The Gentile mission, then, for Pannenberg, seems to have arisen as the result of the conviction that the resurrected Jesus now has already been exalted to Lordship in

³² Ibid., p. 70.

³³ Bultmann, I, 37-43.

Heaven, and the consequent news of his Lordship is to be carried to all nations.

Transition to the Gentile mission was itself inevitable, then, as soon as Jesus' resurrection was understood in its connection with the crucifixion as the expression of his rejection by Israel. ³⁴

Bultmann does not seem so distant at this point as he states that the message of the raising of Jesus is a basic constituent of the Hellenistic Kerygma. ³⁵

3. Summary. The event of the resurrection, then, has its own meaning within its sphere in the history of traditions. For the primitive Christian community, it was the beginning of the end. It was the confirmation and exaltation of Jesus by the very God. It was the ultimate demonstration of the divinity of Israel's God as the God of all. Only thus can Jesus' resurrection be the basis of faith without being supplemented by the external interpretation added to it. ³⁶

C. Jesus' Resurrection as Historical Problem.

The resurrection of Jesus is the event, which historically speaking, was the point of departure for the history of Christendom. So the Easter event is the starting point for the history of faith in Christ. Historical origin and substantial foundation are one at this point.

³⁴Pannenberg, Jesus-God and Man, pp. 71-72.

³⁵Bultmann, I, 80.

³⁶Pannenberg, Jesus-God and Man, p. 73.

It is only in the raising of Jesus that we have reason to speak of his incarnation, for this doctrine develops in reflection upon what his raising meant.

In the resurrection of Jesus, for Pannenberg, we have the sustaining foundation of the Christian faith. If this collapses, so does everything else which is called the content of the faith. The whole context stands or falls with the resurrection event. The historicity of Jesus' resurrection, then, is vital. For as Pannenberg claims that Christian faith stands or falls on the historicity of the resurrection, so does Pannenberg's theology stand or fall on the very same.³⁷

We have at the beginning, two strands of Easter tradition. There are the appearance traditions and the empty grave. The Gospels attempt to bring these two complexes together. In the oldest stratum of tradition the strands remain separate. Mark reports only an empty tomb in Chapter sixteen. Paul reports the appearances of the Risen Lord in I Corinthians 15. Historically, one must investigate both traditions separately.

1. The Appearance Tradition. In I Corinthians 15:1-11. is concentrated the historical question of the appearances, for Pannenberg. He dwells upon these verses at length. The appearance of the gospels are so legendary, one can scarcely find a kernel of truth in them. Bultmann does not place near the importance upon this text. For

³⁷ Pannenberg, The Apostles Creed, pp. 96-97.

Conzelmann, the eyewitness "proof" of the resurrection of Jesus is one of the ways in which the church confronts the world with the Easter testimony and vindicates its truth (I Corinthians 15:3ff). The other is by reference to the testimony of scripture (I Corinthians 15:4). But "vindicate" is indeed quite a distance from Pannenberg's historical proof.³⁸

In I Corinthians we have an enumeration of the basic appearances of Jesus. First, he appeared to Peter, then to the twelve, then to five hundred brethren, to all the apostles, and finally to Paul. The extent of this, for Pannenberg, is to give proof by means of witnesses for the facticity of Jesus' resurrection. The intent to prove is obvious for him in verse six with reference to five hundred brethren, some of whom are fallen asleep, but most of whom are alive.

Is this historical proof in the modern sense? It is at least clear that the vital interest of the historian lies at the basis of all historical investigation, though this interest cannot be permitted to prejudice the results of the inquiry. Paul's intention was to give historical inquiry that is supposedly disinterested.

In scrutinizing the Pauline report's origin, Pannenberg notes that it is very close to the events themselves. I Corinthians was written in the Spring of 56 or 57 A.D. at Ephesus. Three years after his conversion, Paul was in Jerusalem, and visited Peter and James. If his conversion can be dated in the year 33 or 35, and Jesus' death

³⁸ Hans Conzelmann, An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 65.

was in the year 30, Paul would have been in Jerusalem six to eight years after the events. From this we may deduce that this text is very close to the events themselves. In addition to this, the formulations used here by Paul are not from memory ad hoc, but appeals to a formulated tradition which apparently arose very early, prior to Paul's visit to Jerusalem. The formula may have reached back to the first five years after Jesus' death.³⁹

Where one begins to ask what sort of experience these appearances were, one encounters the greatest difficulties. Here, once again, Pannenberg uses Paul's experience.

Five elements can be set forth. 1) The relation of the appearances to the man Jesus has been clear to Paul. God has revealed the Son to him (Galatians 1:16), and Paul has seen the Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 9:1). 2) Paul has seen a spiritual body (*sōma pneumatikon*), not a person with a earthly body. 3) This is not an encounter taking place on earth. The appearances were coming from heaven. 4) The Damascus experience could have happened as light phenomenon (Acts 9:3f). 5) Paul's Christophany was connected with audition. All witnesses, with the possible exceptions of 4) may be presupposed for the other appearances of the Resurrected Lord.

The appearances may have involved an extraordinary vision, not an event visible to everyone. "If someone sees something others present are not able to see, it involves a vision."⁴⁰ The New

³⁹ Pannenberg, Jesus-God and Man, pp. 89-91.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 92-93.

Testament is aware of several forms of visions: dreams and visions while awake, visions in ecstasy, and visions in a peaceful frame of mind. Paul considered his vision to be the last appearance of the Resurrected Lord.

Pannenberg believes that attempts to explain the resurrection appearances in terms of the mentality of the disciples, excluding the reality of the resurrection, have failed. The Easter appearances are not to be explained from the Easter faith of the disciples. The Easter faith of the disciples is to be explained from the appearances. Rather, Jesus' death exposed the faith of the disciples to severe stress. Psychological conclusions which maintain the appearances were generated by the imagination of the disciples are as little suited to support as is the criticism of New Testament traditions.

The primitive Christian view about the eschatological resurrection of Jesus, with a temporary interval separating it from the universal resurrection of the dead is something new both in the history of religions and in the framework of apocalyptic tradition.⁴¹

If the historian approaches his or her work with the conviction that the "dead do not rise", then, one has already decided that Jesus could not have risen. (I Corinthians 15:16).

So the resurrection of Jesus can be designated as historical event in this sense. If the emergence of this tradition of appearances traced back by Paul to the appearance of the resurrected Jesus,

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 95-96.

can be examined in the light of eschatological hope for a resurrection of the dead, then that which is so designated is historical event, even if we do not know anything more in particular about it.

The possibility of the resurrection has been opposed on the grounds that this violates the laws of nature. One must be careful when asserting this, Pannenberg states. First, only a part of the laws of nature are ever known. Secondly, an individual event is never completely determined by natural laws. Finally, everything that happens is contingent. Even the validity of the laws of nature is itself contingent. Natural science must declare its own inability to make definitive judgments about the possibility or impossibility of an event, regardless of how certainly it is able to measure the probability of an events' occurrence. So, the judgment about whether an event (however unfamiliar) has happened, is, in the final analysis, a matter for the historian. ⁴²

A theological objection to the resurrection as historical event, is that the resurrection from the dead has to do with the beginning of a new aeon. However, the reality of the new aeon cannot be perceived through the eyes of the old aeon. Because the life of the resurrected Lord involved the reality of a new creation, he is not perceptible as one object among others in this world. So, he can only be experienced by an extraordinary mode of appearance, that is, the vision, and there can be expressed only in metaphorical language. In this reality, he

⁴² Ibid., pp. 97-99.

made himself known in the midst of our time at a given time, in a limited number of events, to particularly designated persons. There is, therefore, no reason to say Jesus' resurrection happened, if it is not to be affirmed as historical event. This is not made certain by faith, but by historical research. In fact, the only method of making certain of events of past time, for Pannenberg, is historical research.⁴³

In contrast to Pannenberg's assertions, Conzelmann states that what the historian can infer from the text is not the reality of the resurrection as historical event, but rather the Easter faith of the disciples. For Conzelmann, since the resurrection of Jesus is not recognizable to everyone in an objective way, it discloses itself to faith. Thus, the question, did something objective or subjective happen, is itself an inappropriate one. Resurrection is thus visible only to faith, and its truth cannot be proved historically. The only proof is of faith itself. In this faith of the disciples, the Lord shows himself to be the Lord. The proclamation of his Lordship produces the demonstration of this truth - the gospel is preached to the poor, and they are given forgiveness of sins.

For Conzelmann, the resurrection is historical event for Paul, in that he cannot know the modern theological distinction between historical and suprahistorical. The real theological proof of the resurrection is the "proof of the spirit and power", that is, that Jesus shows himself today to be the Exalted One when reconciliation happens

⁴³ Ibid., p. 99.

in preaching. The questions of the historicity of the resurrection, must be excluded from theology as a misleading one. A better concern is "that the cross should not be void of meaning".⁴⁴

2. The Empty Tomb Tradition. This tradition, says Pannenberg, is vital to the faith of the disciples in Jersulam. How could these disciples have proclaimed the resurrection if they could be constantly refuted by viewing the grave where his body was interred?

Pannenberg answers those who assert that probably no one knew of the location of the grave by pointing to the Jewish polemic against the early Christians that his body had been stolen. So the Jews apparently shared the conviction that Jesus' grave was empty.

(It is only when one restricts one's self to the analysis of the textual tradition for the basis of historical judgment, that one can come to a negative conclusion in the question of the Empty Tomb.)

On the other hand, the possibility that Jesus' body and his tomb had never been heard of again after such a short time is worth considering only when one presupposes that Jesus was buried as a criminal in an empty tomb or in a mass grave without anyone informing the disciples of the location of Jesus' body. This is extremely improbable for Pannenberg, in the light of the Jewish Polemic, and the Joseph of Arimethea story.

The Joseph story is not a secondary invention for Pannenberg as the entire tradition of Jesus' burial rests on this name. In addition, I Corinthians 15:4 states "he was buried." This gives us

⁴⁴ Conzelmann, pp. 68, 204.

some indication of the age of tradition about the grave.⁴⁵

It is not difficult for Bultmann to call the Joseph of Arimathea a secondary construction because of his hypothesis that the Church surmounted the scandal of the cross by interpreting it by the resurrection. This demands existential faith, not historical proof, as such.⁴⁶

The relationship between the Empty Tomb tradition and the Appearance Tradition is difficult. There is agreement that the appearances took place in Galilee, and the grave was discovered in Jerusalem. For Pannenberg, whether the disciples returned to Galilee after Jesus was taken prisoner, or whether they remained in Jerusalem is crucial. If the disciples began to return to Galilee immediately, the empty grave would have been discovered without them, and the appearances would be independent of the empty grave discovery.

Historical research at this point, Pannenberg believes must state that the return of the disciples to Galilee took place independently of the discovery of the empty grave, and the disciples came to know about the grave only by returning later to Jerusalem. If this is not so, why do we not then read of the disciples witnessing the crucifixion, or why do the disciples not play a part in the burial, Pannenberg wants to know.

If the Appearance Tradition and the Empty Tomb Tradition

⁴⁵ Pannenberg, Jesus-God and Man, pp. 100-103.

⁴⁶ Bultmann, I, 44-45.

came into existence independently, then by mutually complementing each other they allow the assertion of the reality of Jesus' resurrection appearances as historically probable. This always means that it is to be presupposed until contrary evidence appears.

Bultmann dismisses the accounts of the empty tomb as legends. He assumes Paul knows nothing about them, because he does not mention them. They are, then another way of interpreting the cross, another way of proclaiming this interpretation to the world. These legends have nothing to do with the proofs even of the time. The proofs were the eyewitnesses (I Corinthians 15:4). Christ's death and resurrection are, therefore cosmic occurrences, not incidents which took place once upon a time in the past. By then the old aeon with its powers has been stripped of its power. The present is only an interval. ⁴⁸

D. The Conception of the Resurrection of the Dead.

1. Resurrection as Metaphorical Image. In Pannenberg's theology, when one speaks about resurrection of the dead, we are speaking in a metaphor. In the same way one is awakened from sleep and rises, so it will happen to the dead. In this way we may speak of an event which eludes everyday experience, and can be spoken of only indirectly. The intended reality of the metaphor is beyond the experience of the person who lives on this side of death. So we speak using images of a this-worldly occurrence. This is, then, a way in which one may speak about an event still hidded in its true essence.

⁴⁸ Bultmann, I, 44,82, 299.

The notion of resurrection in the metaphorical concept, has the most basic analogy in the revivification of a corpse. This is not what the oldest form of the Christian concept had in mind. For Paul, the resurrection means the new life of a new body, not the return of life to a dead fleshly body. I Corinthians 15:35-36 indicates that the resurrected body will be a "spiritual body", not a fleshly body with a soul.

Just as other creatures have various kinds of bodies, so the resurrected will have a body, but it will be a different special one.⁴⁹

2. Radical Transformation. For Pannenberg, there is a relationship between this fleshly body, and the spiritual resurrected body. The transformation will happen to this mortal body. So on the one hand, the transformation will be so radical, that nothing remains unchanged. On the other hand, something different will not be produced in its place. There will be a historical continuity between the fleshly and the spiritual body.⁵⁰ "The resurrected body is really the same body,... the whole extension of our present life, which will either perish at the judgment of God under its contrast to its human destiny or will be immortalized and glorified through participation in his immortality and glory".⁵¹

3. The Apocalyptic Context. The hope for the future in post-exilic Judaism was the expectation of the resurrection derived from

⁴⁹ Pannenberg, Jesus-God and Man, pp. 74-75.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 75-76.

⁵¹ Pannenberg, The Apostles Creed, p. 175.

Apocalyptic. In another chapter we have discussed some Biblical references to this.

There are significant differences in apocalyptic literature concerning the content of activities to take place in the resurrection. Isaiah 26 pictures the resurrection of the dead as saving event. Jahweh will provide salvation through resurrection from death. In Daniel 12, however, it is not saving event. It is the entrance for some into eschatological salvation. For others an awakening to shame. In the Apocalypse of Enoch 22, only the martyrs and those wicked who have had an easy life will be raised. Beginning with Enoch 51, however, the idea of a universal resurrection apparently generally prevailed. The older Tanmiatic school of rabbis taught a universal resurrection of the dead. The later Pharisaic party, for the most part expected only the resurrection of the righteous, according to Josephus.⁵²

4. Christianity in the Apocalyptic Concept. Kittel is incorrect, Pannenberg protests, when he says that Orthodox Jewish faith expected mere resuscitation of a corpse. The transformation of the fleshly body into a spiritual body is in no way an initially Christian idea, or more specifically, it is not originally Paul's idea. Christian faith stood squarely in the middle of Orthodox faith here.

For Paul the resurrection is only for believers. In this sense, it has for him, a saving character. Perhaps this is also the thought of Jesus, says Pannenberg, when in his discussion with the

⁵² Bultmann, I, 78.

Sadducees (Mark 12:26f) he justifies the hope of the resurrection from the fact that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is not the God of the dead but of the living.⁵³

5. Jesus' Resurrection and the Believers' Resurrection. Paul claims the presupposition of the resurrection of the dead for recognition of Jesus' resurrection. On the other hand, the event of Jesus' resurrection in turn substantiates the truth of the expectation of a resurrection for believers. But the general concept of resurrection cannot be altogether established from Jesus' resurrection. Such an argument would be circular. Rather, the expectation of resurrection must already be presupposed as truth from anthropology or philosophy when one speaks of Jesus' resurrection. It is Jesus' resurrection which guarantees the individual his or her own future participation in salvation. The presupposition of the dead's raising is based upon the promise of God that the dead shall rise.

Pannenberg then wants to bring this apocalyptic dimension into the Hellenistic missionary Kerygma. The freedom of Gentile congregations from Jewish law, he says, does not mean that all Jewish traditions have become meaningless. Rather when I Thessalonians 1:10 names the resurrected Jesus as the one who will save us from the wrath to come, which, he concludes, is the summary of the missionary Kerygma, the message already includes the Apocalyptic expectation of the end of history.⁵⁴

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 78-81.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 81-82.

Not surprisingly, Bultmann's concepts of resurrection are more cosmic orientated. When he speaks of the individual's involvement, it is in terms of the existential life of the believer.⁵⁵

He agrees with Pannenberg that Jesus stands in the Jewish context of Jewish expectations about the end of the world and God's new future. He speaks in terms of the "old aeon" and the "new aeon" which Pannenberg does not like, for reasons stated earlier, that it is not possible for the old aeon to speak of the new aeon. Bultmann believes that Paul's idea of the resurrection of Christ is one of victory over the cosmic powers that is still being played in the present. The old aeon has been stripped of its powers and the present is only an interval.⁵⁶

For Bultmann, there is for the believer, a transition into eschatological existence. One is lifted out of secular existence. The believer has death behind her or him. it is a case of being in the world but not of the world. He does not want to "spiritualize" the resurrection as much as does Pannenberg. Here, he may very well accuse Pannenberg of tending toward Gnosticism when he speaks of a radical transformation for Bultmann is one of a way of life then a definition of bodily makeup. As for Paul, says Bultmann, he champions the old realistic resurrection over against the Gnostic spiritualization of it.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Bultmann, I, 78.

⁵⁶ Ibid., I, 5, 299.

⁵⁷ Ibid., I, 78, 169, 178.

Conzelmann states that if the resurrection of the dead is disputed, then the resurrection of Christ is disputed and forth is in vain. In this he can agree with Pannenberg. He does not speculate about resurrection except for the futurity of it. Death no longer has power today in the life in the spirit. Here he is in keeping with Bultmann's assertion that the resurrected life is now given to the believer. We shall not escape death, but death itself will be destroyed at the resurrection.⁵⁸

6. The Apocalyptic Concept in Today's World. Pannenberg proposes that although the apocalyptic concept of the end of the world is untenable in many details, its fundamental elements, the expectation of a resurrection of the dead, in connection with the end of the world and the final judgment can still remain true even for us. The Christian motivation for faith in Jesus Christ is so bound up in the apocalyptic expectation of the end of history, that if the apocalyptic expectation is excluded from the realm of possibility for us, then the early Christian faith in Christ is also excluded.

One must be clear that when one discusses the truth of a future judgment, and a resurrection of the dead, one is dealing directly with the basis of the Christian faith. Why the man Jesus can be the ultimate revelation of God, and why in him and only in him God is supposed to have appeared, remains incomprehensible apart from the horizon of apocalyptic expectation. This kind of knowledge of Jesus

⁵⁸ Conzelmann, pp. 187-189.

can be subsequently translated into a different pattern of thought, but it cannot be established from the perspective of these other patterns of thought. If the apocalyptic horizon is eliminated, Christology becomes mythology, and no longer has continuity with Jesus and the apostle's witness.⁵⁹

Pannenberg continues by presuming that it is a generally accepted anthropological finding that the definition of the essence of humans does not come to ultimate fulfillment in the finitude of earthly life. There is truth that humans can realize their humanity in community with others, but one must affirm that the human destiny which every individual seeks is different from the particular community in which the humans live. If this is true, asserts Pannenberg, then the question of her or his humanity must be disregarded as meaningless.⁶⁰

7. The Phenomenology of Hope. Whether or not hope is a meaningful attitude in life is decided for the individual in the final analysis of the question of whether there is something to be hoped for beyond death. If death is the end, all hope for coming fulfillment seems to be foolish. It is foolish to long for a future that only brings one nearer to a grave.

The phenomenology of hope indicates it belongs to the essence of conscious human existence to hope beyond death. This supposition,

⁵⁹ Pannenberg, Jesus-God and Man, p. 83.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 84.

he declares, is confirmed by the special element in human existence expressed in language of modern anthropology by the concept of human openness in relation to the world, or in another manner of speaking, human environmental freedom. That is, humans are not restricted in behavior by the environment setting off the instinctive reaction. Rather, humans first determine the direction of their impulses. Humans never achieve more than a temporary concretion of their strivings. The whole of their impulses point beyond every given situation and press toward further better fulfillment of impulses for their destinies. They are the only creatures who know they will die. This allows, then, for the question, of what lies beyond the grave. The anthropological openness is lost when questioning beyond death does not occur. To surrender one's self to such questioning is the condition for full humanness.⁶¹

8. Resurrection and Immortality.

a. Anthropological Considerations. Until recently, the immortality of the soul has obstructed the question of the truth of the Biblical hope of resurrection in the Western history of ideas. It has long been foregone conclusion that the immortality of the soul is established fact. In contrast, the hope of resurrection appeared to be a concept guaranteed only by the supernatural authority of revelation. But, separation between the body and soul which is the basis for the concept of immortality is no longer tenable in the light of contemporary anthropological insights.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 85-86.

What was once distinguished as body and soul is today considered a unity of human conduct. The so-called life after death can no longer be thought of as immortality of the soul, but as another existence of the whole person. And that, says Pannenberg, is precisely the picture of the resurrection of the dead.

These considerations reach back from modern anthropological problems to the content of apocalyptic expectation. In some form, he maintains, the assumption of the relation between the resurrection of the dead and the end of the world is meaningful. Certainly the resurrection is not imaginable within this present world. But, human understanding does not go beyond the context of humans in the world.⁶²

b. Philosophical Considerations. Pannenberg claims resurrection can also be established as a philosophically appropriate expression for human destiny. In terms of a universal resurrection, there is a unity of human destiny for all individuals, in that it is a fate which involves all humans. Even if resurrection is only for "believers", and in such case would be understood as saving event, it is still related to the unity of humanity because it is connected with the idea of universal judgment coming over all persons at the end of history in which every individual will be measured in terms of the destiny of humans.

So, today a continuity of modern thought with apocalyptic hope has become possible at this decisive point, and with this a continuity

⁶²Ibid., p. 87.

with the Christian perception of Jesus' resurrection in the past, and our resurrection in the future.⁶³

Perhaps Conzelmann may appropriately climax our theological reflections upon resurrection when he asserts that during earthly life, we are constantly being delivered over to death, and yet we are free from death. Their unity is our everyday reality. (Philippians 4:11-13)⁶⁴

Now having laid Biblical and Theological foundations, we shall attempt to engage in our own reflections while retaining strains of thought from Pannenberg, and remaining loyal to Biblical thought.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 88.

⁶⁴ Conzelmann, p. 287.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

I. METHODOLOGY

We shall proceed under the principles of interpreting Scripture in the tradition of Pannenberg's theology. These principles have their origin in the concepts of the ancient apocalypics, but have been abstracted, and made normative, for Pannenberg's purposes, apart from the world-view which originally supported them.

This methodology does not allow for a static Canon which demands a presupposition of the same world-view which was assumed at the time the particular Scripture was written. The Scriptures are not formal and concrete, but move through history as the Word of God. The text interprets the situation and the situation interprets the text. The text, then becomes God's message for the time in which it is interpreted.¹

We shall proceed with our integration under certain anthropological assumptions.

The separation of the physical body and some kind of ethereal soul is no longer tenable in the light of contemporary anthropological insights. Rather, today's anthropological insights call for unity of humanity.

¹ Norman Perrin, The New Testament, An Introduction (New York: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, 1974), p. 71. This information was initially offered in Chapter Three of this project.

With this in mind, life after death then, must be spoken of in terms of another existence of the whole person. This is precisely what the concept of the resurrection of the dead demands.

This concept of resurrection is not imaginable within this present world. Our understandings do not go beyond the context of humans in this world. Our modern anthropological understandings, then reaches back and finds affinity with the apocalyptic expectations of a new age.²

Our procedure for integration will follow certain steps. First, an item of research or a conclusion of the research will be stated. Secondly, a theological response is offered. Though this response will be in the tradition of Pannenberg's theology, it will not simply be a summary of his thought, but will contain some new attempts at theological insights that offer Christian perspective on the life-after-death research in today's world! Thirdly, we shall point out where this project does not come to grips with some pertinent questions, and where further work is to be done. Finally, some guidelines for pastoral theology will be offered.

II. THEOLOGICAL RESPONSES

A. Detachment From The Physical Body - A Spiritual Body.

1. The Kübler-Ross -- Moody Research. Patients of Kübler-Ross express a detachment from their physical bodies. The dead persons may

² Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jesus-God and Man (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), p. 87. These principles were introduced in Chapter Four of this project.

see their corpses from afar. As soon as they realize what has happened to them they do not feel any more concern for their bodies.³ Some of Moody's patients feel that they have a "spiritual" body.⁴

2. Theological Response. The sustaining foundation of Christian faith is the concept of resurrection, which stands squarely in the tradition of the Orthodox faith of Jesus' day. More particularly, the resurrection of Jesus is the pivotal point upon which moves the hope of the resurrection of humans.⁵

What, then, can faith's response be to the idea of a person detached from the body, or having a spiritual body, in the ethereal sense?

The New Testament theme which has been given attention in this project is the concept that a spiritual body is the incorruptible continuation of the corruptible body that is subject to death. There are other ideas in the New Testament which have not been discussed here.

Secondly, we have very little historical information within the New Testament concerning the place or condition of the person upon the death of the human body. The human person becomes whole, only when the corruptible body is raised as an incorruptible one.

Thirdly, this "spiritual" existence that Moody's patients describe cannot be the same as the Old Testament's understanding of

³ Raymond A. Moody, Jr., Life After Life (New York: Bantam, 1975), pp. 25-39.

⁴ Kenneth L. Woodward, "There is Life After Death", McCall's (August 1976), 137.

⁵ Wolfhart Pannenberg, The Apostles Creed (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), pp. 96-97.

the pale reflection of the person in Sheol. There is no sense of wholeness in Sheol. Rather, there is a separation from Jahweh. This has more affinity to the immortality of the soul than to the resurrection motif.

Finally, we may respond that this research is significant in the sense that theology should remain open to further research in this area. Theology certainly cannot reject this idea of a "spiritual" body, though we do not understand the "spiritual" body in the same terms. Clearly, both the Old and New Testaments allow for some kind of continuation of the person after life in the physical body ceases. However, the New Testament's hope goes beyond this kind of seemingly ethereal existence to one of being united with an incorruptible body at the resurrection, sometime in the future.

B. The "Light-Being"

1. The Klibler-Ross -- Moody Research. Most patients relate that during the time they are out of their bodies, they come in contact with a light. This light seems to have personal characteristics about it.⁶ All persons, religious and non-religious are drawn to the light. It gradually increases in brilliance to a degree that is described by some as reaching unearthly dimensions.⁷

"God is the light and love these people experience," Klibler-Ross

⁶ Elisabeth Klibler-Ross Lecture, Brawley, California, April 28, 1977.

⁷ Moody, pp. 56-73.

states. "They are entering His Presence. That, for me, is beyond the shadow of a doubt." ⁸

2. Theological Response. There is an interesting parallel to the "light-being" in this research, within the New Testament in terms of the resurrection appearances of Jesus to Paul. It is possible that the Damascus experience could have happened as light phenomenon (Acts 9:3f). There is no mention of a "light-being" within the context of the other appearances. Paul seems to be certain that his experience on the Damascus road is the last appearance of the resurrected Christ to a human being. We may assume then, that characteristics of the other appearances were common to the experience of Paul; that is, the appearance has relation to the man Jesus, that the resurrected body is not an earthly one, that it is not an encounter occurring on earth, and that the Christophany contained audition. ⁹ The light phenomenon, however, seems to be explicit only within the terms of Paul's experience.

It must be noted at this point that there are definite differences between the appearance of the "light-being" in the life-after-death research and the light which appeared to Paul. First, it is clear that Paul was physically alive when this appearance took place. On the other hand, in the research, the people were, reportedly, out of their physical bodies when they viewed the light-being. Secondly,

⁸ Woodward, p. 136.

⁹ Pannenberg, Jesus-God and Man, pp. 92-93.

the light in Paul's experience seems to penetrate the earthly dimension, into the presence of the light-being. There are congruences, however.

First, Pannenberg believes that the appearances may have involved an extraordinary vision, not an event visible to everyone.¹⁰ Clearly, the appearance of the "light-being" to the persons in the research was visible only to them within the context of their experience. Purportedly, while this was happening, their corpses were undergoing resuscitation procedures.

Secondly, the appearance of the Risen Lord occurred to Paul before he was persuaded to be a believer. The light-being in the life-after-death research appeared to all people regardless of whether they had religious faith or not. It must be pointed out, however, that Paul's experience was unique, in that all the other reported experiences of those who confronted the Risen Lord had been in contact with the man Jesus and had followed him before he died.

We may conclude, then, that one of the characteristics of the appearance of the Risen Lord of Easter Faith to Paul was light. Paul did not claim that this was God. It was, rather God who had raised Jesus, and has confirmed the pre-Easter activity of Jesus. It was the conclusion of the disciples, then, that the man Jesus is the Son of Man. God then, is ultimately revealed in Jesus. In Hellenistic terms, then, God has appeared on earth.

We may not conclude, however, that because the light-being in the life-after death research and the light in Paul's confron-

¹⁰ Ibid., 92-93.

tation with the Risen Lord have similarities, that they are one and the same.

Christian faith cannot affirm this new data as part of its proclamation as it asserts the resurrection appearances of Easter faith. We conclude with Paul, that the Risen Lord has appeared to him. We cannot conclude with the same certainty as Kübler-Ross does, that the "light-being" in her research is God.

C. The Review.

1. The Kübler-Ross -- Moody Research. When the person comes in contact with the light-being in the Kübler-Ross -- Moody research, an evaluation of the person takes place in the presence of the light. The life of the person passes in front of her or him, and the person is able to observe every word, action, and deed that has ever occurred in her or his life. From this "review" the person becomes aware of how her or his life has affected others.¹¹

The light-being communicates with the person in terms of mental communication as opposed to verbal language. The communication's content is in the form of questions asking, "Are you prepared to die?" "What have you done with your life that is sufficient?" These questions are not judgmental, but Socratic in tone. The light-being and the person there begin to view the past person's life. This review is described as three-dimensional, moving, and in vibrant color.¹²

¹¹ Kübler-Ross Lecture.

¹² Moody, pp. 56-73.

Kübler-Ross concludes that justice is seen in the review that takes place. One learns lessons about one's self by being made totally aware of whatever pain or suffering any of one's actions may have caused another human being.

"This is incredibly logical. And when you listen to it, it makes you religious in a very genuine sense of the word, because no man could invent such a fair system. To me, this is beautiful." ¹³

2. Theological Response. The apocalyptic end of history is a part of the apocalyptic expectation into which Christianity is bound up. According to Pannenberg, if the apocalyptic dimension of Christianity is diminished, then the concept of resurrection crumbles, and with it Christian faith. We proceed with a theological response with this as a basis. ¹⁴

Pannenberg admits difficulties with the idea of resurrection as a unity of human destiny, if the resurrection is viewed as saving event, that is, if resurrection is seen only as saving event.

He then concludes that the unity of human destiny can be found in the idea of universal judgment coming over all persons at the end of history. Every individual will be judged according to one standard of justice. ¹⁵

¹³ Ann Nietzsche, "The Miracle of Kübler-Ross", Human Behavior (September 1977), 22.

¹⁴ Pannenberg, The Apostle's Creed, pp. 96-97.

¹⁵ Pannenberg, Jesus-God and Man, p. 88.

First, Kübler-Ross' idea of the review being a fair system of justice, on the surface appears to be a fair conclusion. The contrast however, between her idea of judgment and the early Christian's idea are somewhat removed from each other. Kübler-Ross has the review as an end in itself; that is, the Review is both the judgment and the punishment. To her Hitler and Mother Teresa die the same kind of deaths. Apparently the difference is in the pain that Hitler would see that he had inflicted upon the world in the Review. So, Kübler-Ross' idea of judgment is based upon moral grounds.

It also seems that a gracious force is at work opening the person's eyes in order that they can see their lives. Judgment, as such, is for the purpose of purging those who are judged, through a losing of their "old self" in being drawn toward the light and the feelings of peace.

The early Christians saw the final judgment, not primarily on moral grounds. Rather it was the choice one had made concerning Jesus the Christ and the quality of life which followed that choice upon which one was judged.

D. Ineffability.

1. The Kübler-Ross -- Moody Research. Most patients involved in the research sensed an inability to find language to express what has happened to them.¹⁶ This difficulty is found most particularly in the Moody research.

¹⁶ Moody, p. 73.

2. Theological Response. It can be noted here that lack of empirical scientific proof has been an objection raised against both Jesus' resurrection and the life-after-death research. Both claims are said to violate the laws of nature.

Perhaps the same defense of the life-after-death research could be used as Pannenberg uses for defending the resurrection of Jesus against this objection. First, he says, only a part of the laws of nature are ever known. Secondly, an individual event is never completely determined by natural law, and finally, everything that happens is contingent including the laws of nature themselves.¹⁷

Secondly, the idea of metaphor may be important here. Both the idea of resurrection and the reported life-after-death experiences have a similar difficulty in that they are both beyond common human experience. Language can only adequately express that which is within the realm of human experience. The intended reality of a metaphor, then, is beyond the experience of those to whom it is addressed. It expresses an image of an event, not the actual event itself. This is a way, then, that one may speak about an event still hidden in its true essence. Resurrection is an expression in metaphor, for Pannenberg. Perhaps this may be allowed for those attempting to express their experiences of life-after-death which seem to contradict the laws of nature, and go beyond the realm of common human experience.¹⁸

¹⁷ Pannenberg, Jesus-God and Man, pp. 97-99.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 74-75.

If therefore, some of the details of the occurrences offered by those who report life-after-death experiences could be understood as images or symbols of occurrences in another reality, they could, perhaps, be taken more seriously, particularly by those doing theology. Seeing, hearing, feeling, warmth, and other sensory images all offer the suggestion of wholeness. Those who look for a more literalistic raising of the body have an opportunity to enter into dialogue here. As even the idea of these as symbols of another reality create problems within this context.

E. "I Know...There is Life-After-Death." -- Kübler-Ross.

1. The Conclusion. One of the startling conclusions Kübler-Ross makes from her research experiences is, "I know beyond a shadow of a doubt there is life after death."^{19, 20} Rather than saying that her research is inadequate to be proved scientifically, she places the blame squarely on the shoulders of the scientific method itself. Present-day scientific methods are inadequate for investigating life-after-death phenomena, she states.²¹

2. Theological Response. It is a generally accepted anthropological finding that the definite essence of human beings does not come to ultimate fulfillment in the finitude of earthly life.²²

¹⁹ Woodward, p. 97.

²⁰ Neitzke, p. 22.

²¹ Ibid., p. 21.

²² Pannenberg, Jesus-God and Man, p. 84.

Within the context of the phenomenology of hope as a characteristic of human anthropology, it is foolish to hope for fulfillment in the future if death is the end. The essence of human existence is to hope beyond death. This is best expressed in languages of modern anthropological concept of openness to the world, i.e., human existential freedom.

This openness allows for questioning of what lies beyond the grave. In fact, anthropological openness is lost when questioning beyond death does not occur. To surrender one's self to such questioning is the condition for full humanness.²³

With the content of Christian faith being expressed in terms of hope, and with modern anthropological understandings of human beings as creatures of hope, let us proceed to assess Kübler-Ross' statement of being certain of life-after-death.

First of all we may see the obvious contrast between the phenomenology of hope and the certainty of Kübler-Ross' conclusion.

Secondly, the hope of Christian faith is based solidly on the belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This, within our theological assumptions, can be understood as historical (though not yet historical fact) according to Pannenberg's concepts of history and historian. On the other hand, Kübler-Ross' certainty is based upon research findings which cannot be scientifically proved. While the current life-after-death research is interesting phenomena, it cannot

²³ Ibid., pp. 85-95.

find a basis, then, either within the context of the scientific method, or within the context of Christian faith in terms of hope, specifically, for the resurrection of the dead.

Thirdly, the Kübler-Ross -- Moody research is an example of the human anthropological property of questioning beyond death, that is, the openness of the humans. However, to close the case of questioning beyond death by declaring life beyond death a certainty seems to diminish the quality of hope. It is inconsistent to hope for that which we are already certain will happen. To be unable to base this certainty upon scientific proof offers no intelligibility to our age. To be unable to call it hope rather than certainty, gives this conclusion no theological intelligibility. (This is not to negate the findings of the research. This is only a critique of this conclusion.)

Those who accept the conclusion of Kubler-Ross (who cannot base the validity of her findings upon anything but the integrity of their own contents) may be said, therefore, to be expressing their human qualities of openness, that is of questioning what lies beyond the grave, and of hoping for a more concrete actualization of themselves beyond death. Declaring life beyond death to be a certainty is not a quality of openness, anthropologically, however. This statement also has no place in the context of Christian faith. The Christian hope for resurrection is still an open question, that is, only the events which will occur in the future will validate the resurrection of Jesus.

We may, therefore, affirm the Klübler-Ross -- Moody research as valid questioning of what lies beyond the grave, and of hoping beyond it. We may affirm continued research in this area.

Certainty of life-after-death must be based within a framework of belief. Admittedly it cannot be based within the framework of scientific knowledge. An any claim this research makes to validate Christian faith assumes Christian faith to declare life-after-death a certainty, is an improper understanding of Christian faith. Faith hopes for and lives as if there is life beyond death, based upon the graciousness of a loving God. It does not declare it to be a certainty. We must conclude, then, that the life-after-death research has yet to find a frame of reference that will make it intelligible to those who understand life in scientific or theological terms. Moody himself implies this in his reflection upon his research.²⁴

F. The Question of the Existence of Death.

1. The Conclusion. "Death does not really exist", asserts Klübler-Ross.²⁵ The rest of the person continues to exist after physical death, she believes.

2. Theological Response. For Paul, it is very clear that death is real and that no human being will escape it. Death itself is yet to be destroyed. Death though real, has no more power today against

²⁴ Moody, p. 152.

²⁵ Woodward, p. 97.

the new life in the Spirit. ²⁶

But Death is not to be understood as harmless. It is still the last enemy. It becomes harmless only in Christ. It cannot destroy our fellowship with Christ. Paradoxically, we overcome death in Christ, as we are exposed to it (Romans 8:35ff; II Corinthians 4:7ff). ²⁷

Paul responds to the question of how the dead are raised with the comparison of it with a seed (I Corinthians 15:35-38). The analogy is not to be understood in biological-organic terms. Rather, the future of the seed is to be seen as the paradigm of the resurrection. Resurrection is not purely continuity, but the act of new creation. ²⁸

Theological proof of the resurrection is the proof of the spirit and power. ²⁹

So, resurrection life is already here. Christ's resurrection is not conceived of as a case of rising from the dead, but as the origin of the resurrection life of all believers which proceed from it, and can hence be regarded as already possible. ³⁰

From these understandings, we may make the following assertions.

²⁶ Hans Cozelmann, An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 188.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 188.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 188.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 204.

³⁰ Rudolph Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), I, 347-348.

First of all Klibler-Ross' statement that death does not exist has no parallel either in Biblical understandings as a whole or in the understandings of Christian faith. Death is very real, it is visible to us on every side, and it is an enemy of the humans yet to be destroyed.

Secondly, we do not overcome death in terms of Christian faith by denying its existence. Rather we overcome death by facing it. Our faith, then, does not deny the existence of death. It is an enemy and it seeks to exert harm. Humans have no power over it in themselves. Only in Christ does death have no power. Resurrection is faith's response to death, rather than denial of its existence. Jesus Christ himself faced the reality of death. Hence we face death as well, and hope for resurrection.

III. FURTHER RESEARCH

A. Anthropological Difficulties.

1. Klibler-Ross -- Moody. The question of anthropology looms large in the face of the Klibler-Ross -- Moody research. It seems to contain within it implications of the platonic idea of the immortality of the soul. If this is the case, it is diametrically opposed to the modern understandings of anthropology.

Further study needs to take place here in order to determine if this research does find its philosophical basis on belief in the immortality of the soul. This has ramifications for its complementary relationship (or lack of it) with Christian faith with its heavy emphasis

upon resurrection.

2. Pannenberg. Pannenberg's claim is that current anthropology gives new credibility to the concept of the resurrection of the body. While modern anthropological insights invalidate the idea of the immortality of the soul, resurrection is certainly not the only option left to consider. The idea that human life may cease at death is tenable to the strictly scientific mind, and is many times a more persuasive argument from this point of view. So, while we have resurrection as an option for belief, the argument that our current anthropological insights make it more believable raises serious challenges.

Apocalyptic ideas simply do not fit within the framework of current anthropology. That we may extract the apocalyptic belief in resurrection and apply it to our anthropology is tenable. How that may be done with integrity is an important question.

Pannenberg claims Christian faith crumbles without apocalyptic dimensions, he seems to be caught in the tension between remaining loyal to this apocalyptic dimension while embracing modern anthropology. If a synthesis is in order, he has yet to accomplish this.

B. The "Spiritual" or Detached Body.

One of the major strenghts of Pannenberg's theology - the future with its implications for hope - is also a weakness when one grapples with the idea of a spiritual body. It allows for hope for wholeness only when the corruptible body is literally raised incorruptible. With this view, one must remain, for the most part, silent

about the state of the person between physical death and future resurrection. This theological viewpoint can only remain opposed to the wholeness of a person who is physically dead, but not yet resurrected.

A question which remains here, to which Pannenberg does not respond, is the possibility of a "resurrection" at death, that is, the taking on of an incorruptible body that does not have direct dependency upon the corruptible body or upon a future resurrection in history. A theology which does not wait for a future time in history for the verification of the report of Jesus' resurrection, may be more capable of addressing this concept.

C. Theological Reflection.

Theology has been done in recent years on the assumption that immortality of the soul and resurrection are concepts which are set in opposition to one another. While this may be accurate for the most part, there is a need to examine the possibilities for cross-fertilization of these concepts, both in their formulation in ancient times, and the possibilities for today.

A new hermeneutic (apart from these two ideas which have their roots in world-views which are no longer credible) may be in order for speaking of a continued existence beyond physical life. While Pannenberg approaches a new hermeneutic when speaking of resurrection as metaphor, he still seeks to impose apocalyptic principles upon modern insights. While this may be a new way of speaking of resurrection, it does not remove its credibility problems in our world.

The Kübler-Ross -- Moody research may possibly be a resource for this new hermeneutic. It will not be, however, so long as the research lacks credibility in the larger scientific world. While life-after-death researchers may have a point when they say that the scientific principles for verification are too narrow, it does not negate their responsibility to continue research which will make their research acceptable to the scientific world.

As it stands now, this research finds itself in a philosophical "no-man's land", finding its home neither in the world of science or the theological-philosophical world.

Theology cannot respond as appropriately as would be possible, until this research finds a philosophical orientation.

IV. GUIDELINES FOR PASTORAL THEOLOGY

It should be made clear that it is vital that the church maintains an open attitude on life-after-death research. What lies beyond the grave is not only a legitimate human concern; it is a basic question of Christian faith. Since we have determined that openness is a basic anthropological trait of human beings, and since Christian faith seeks to be a humanizing process, openness is vital.

A closed attitude on new knowledge tends to make theology dogmatic and stagnant, hence irrelevant in today's world.

What specifically, lies beyond the grave, in terms of the content of the quality of the individual human life, is vague and unclear. An open mind particularly in this area seems to be critical.

At the same time Christian faith takes an open stance on the research, it must also retain the right to respond to it, and to criticize it.

First, the possibility of parallels in Christian faith and experience should be made clear.

Secondly, where the research or the conclusions drawn from it appear to be in disagreement with Christian faith, it should be made equally clear. Biblically, this gives the Scripture a dynamic place in the life of human affairs. Time is not divided, then into two periods - the times of the Bible, and today when God no longer seems to be so especially active. Theologically, it gives the church the opportunity to speak out on the current concerns of human affairs. It gives place for the Word of God to move into our own history and future. The interpretation of the text becomes God's message for today, and makes theologizing a relevant activity, both in terms of historic Christian faith and in terms of contemporary thought. Finally, it gives theology the opportunity to become more clear on its position(s) on current issues.

It gives pastoral care for the dying and her or his loved ones, and later, the bereaved, and opportunity to offer more than well-worn cliches, or comfort in words which have no relevance to today's understanding.

It is clear from the conclusions of this project that the basis for Christian hope in life beyond the grave is faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Faith says that because Christ is raised, so we shall be raised; as Christ is raised so we are given

new life.

It is because of both the human and the Christian concern for the life beyond death, that the Church must encourage continued research in this area. Faith is not frightened of new knowledge.

It is critical, however, that pastoral care address the issue that, historically, the church has not been saying. Death does exist. It is powerless in Jesus Christ. As we face death it is overcome in Christ. It is the last enemy to be destroyed.

Finally, hope, in the Christian context, lives in the tension between the apparent annihilation effect of death upon humans, and our faith in the Risen Lord. The life-after-death research, therefore, is interesting and significant. It does not, however, provide a basis for moving from hope to certainty. The testimonials of those who claim to have had out-of-the-body experiences do not offer us more hope than does faith in a loving God who cares for all of creation.

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APPENDIX

A SERMON

LIFE AFTER DEATH - A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Text: John 14:1-21

The prospect of death, Dr. Johnson is supposed to have said, wonderfully concentrates the mind.

Ernst Becker, in his book, The Denial of Death, says, "The idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else. It is a mainstream of activity."

From prehistoric times until now, we human beings have been stricken with the fact of our own mortality.

One of our ancestors, Neanderthal Man, was already practicing funeral rites, apparently, from all appearances, he believed that death was the final elevation to a better place - hence, funerals were celebrations.

Job, the Old Testament's suffering hero asks, "If a man die, shall he live again?"

Ponce De Leon apparently spent a number of his allotted years in search of the fabled Fountain of Youth that would stop the effects of time upon the body. (Perhaps his ghost is still with us, haunting us with facial creams that iron out wrinkles, and elixers to keep us young and strong!)

The thought of living beyond physical death has inspired poets such as Longfellow to write -

"Life is real, life is earnest
And the grave is not its goal.
Dust thou art, to dust returnest.
Was not spoken of the soul."

But we live in an age with a scientific world-view. It is both a blessing - rooting out old superstitions and myths, and it is a curse - facts cannot be believed unless they are proved by the scientific method. Everything that matters is matter; and the mind and consciousness are by-products of the physical organism. There is no proof, speaking in strictly scientific terms, that there is anything beyond the grave. And when the body dies, all that science can say is that the body dies. The light is blown out. The personality is no more.

In fact, in all that science can observe about our universe, our world will never die a blazing inferno, but will cool off and die with a whimper in the cold cosmos.

From whatever perspective we look at it, we are faced with the stark fact of our mortality. Someday, we know not when, we as we know ourselves shall cease to exist.

Death escapes no one.

There may be only a difference of seventy revolutions of the earth around the sun from the time the oldest of us here meet our death until the youngest of us go the way of all flesh.

The life forces in each of us hunger for immortality while reason tells us that life as we know it ends in death.

It is probably only the occasional hermit who has not heard of Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross. She is widely known for her writings on the stages of dying. More recently she has laid claim to hearing accounts of some of her patients who have been "near-death" or clinically dead. These persons state that during the times they were

near death, or were clinically dead and were revived, had out-of-the-body experiences - that is - they were conscious while they were dead.

Raymond Moody, a psychiatrist in Georgia, has collected an impressive amount of data about persons who have claimed similar experiences. Moody's and Kübler-Ross's findings have striking likenesses.

Most people who claim these experiences say they are conscious outside their bodies. Apparently some are able to view their own corpses. They later sense themselves rushing through a dark tunnel toward a light. They meet other people who have died before them, or some meet Jesus or Mary. But there is something special about the light. It is no ordinary light - it is a light-being. It has personal characteristics and communicates with the person. They, together, view and review the dead person's life. A sort of "judgment" takes place. Later, they wake up in their own bodies.

Moody is careful to say that his research does not prove there is life after death.

Kübler-Ross takes a different stand.

"The research is done." "I know beyond a shadow of a doubt there is life after death." "There is no such thing as death."

While she has been criticized by her colleagues in the scientific community, she has become a sort of guru to many people who read her every word as truth.

Many Christians have taken up her works, uncritically, saying that these discoveries indeed prove what the church has been saying

for two thousand years.

Predictably, a rash of books on the subject have been flooding the market, riding the tide of popularity of talking about death, and life after death.

Two parapsychologists have recently released a book which gives the results of over 1000 after life testimonies.

Another book which combines a hodge-podge of Christianity, the occult, and psychics has a chapter - believe it or not - entitled "The thrill of dying!"

A reasonable local minister has written a book called Beyond and Back in that inimitable National Enquirer style, so sensationalized, that it might be better called Tales of the Morbid and Macabre.

The cover boasts of "first-hand experiences", and "exciting photographs". Exciting indeed if one is interested in looking at pictures of people in the hour of their grief, or just before they die, or at plane-crash wreckage. The book follows no coherent theme, which make the scientific mind blush, and embarrass the Christian. One feels he has intruded upon something very private, and has destroyed the dignity of the human person by even perusing this book.

Standing amidst all this, it is all very confusing. It is so difficult to tell the real from the ridiculous, the sincere from the absurd, the healer from the huckster.

Where can the Christian stand? What is it that the Christian can say he or she knows for certain about life after death?

Let me say I do not claim to have the Christian response to the claims of life-after-death researchers. But as one who calls

himself a Christian, I make this personal response. And I believe it carries with it some aspects of historic Christian faith and content.

Before we go any further, I would like to clarify that the Christian response is a faith response. That is, faith does not say "I know". Faith says "I believe". That is, I believe that twenty years from now, Valencia United Methodist Church will be here. I do not know it. But a faith statement says, "I believe it".

Therefore I can say...

1. I believe that life here and now is worth living.

By that I do not mean to say I espouse the Hedonistic Playboy philosophy of "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!" That happily-ever-after only works in fairy tales. Toynbee has said that this kind of life is followed by anxieties and maladies. (And, I might add, a hangover!)

But neither do I mean to say that life here is simply to be endured until we get to our real home. There's an old gospel song which says...

"This world is not my home
I'm just a passin through.
My treasures are laid up
Somewhere beyond the blue.
The angels beckon me
From heaven's open door
And I can't feel at home
In this world anymore."

That kind of attitude has helped keep things the way they are on this earth. It has made some rich at the expense and the misery of others. It is a kind of pietistic, self-righteous detachment from the way things are going. The world is coming to an end anyway.

This kind of attitude takes some kind of morbid pleasure in the state of the world - famines, wars, pestilences. It can't be too long till Jesus comes and takes us away from all this!

No, No, No, a thousand times No!

As long as I live on this earth, it is my home. And my responsibility to live here. God has placed us here in this time and place. And that means something!

I can affirm this life on earth, because God has cared enough to get involved in it. And because I believe God is still intimately involved in it.

The wisdom teachers of Israel taught that below the surface of human affairs, beneath the tragedies, the contradictions and seeming injustice in life, Yahweh was working out a purpose. It was the wise person who could see that even when it wasn't visible.

It is a statement of faith to look at the world in which we live.

-with starving children

-with racism - both covert and overt

-with good people struck down with debilitating or terminal illness

-with senseless killing and maiming

-and still affirm life on earth.

It is a statement of faith to live with my own personal mix of pain and pleasure and still at times affirm life on earth.

But as a Christian I can believe that this life has meaning because,

2. I believe that life and death are mastered in Jesus Christ.

In our text, Jesus told his disciples he was going to prepare a place for them. He said he would come again and receive them unto himself. He said, he was the way, the truth, and the life.

I can believe those words because Jesus lived a fully human life, and that he died a fully human death. But, I can also believe those words because I believe that on Easter Sunday something happened which no one has yet explained nor explained away. According to our records, Jesus' corpse was not where it was supposed to be, in fact no-one could find it, and over a period of time he is said to have appeared to many of his disciples.

I believe that Jesus Christ mastered life and death because two thousand years of history has seen hope breathed again and again into the human spirit for those who have had the courage to live life as if it had meaning.

O yes, there is the Thomas in me that says, "Lord, what lies ahead? What kind of life is there, if any, after death? How can I really know there is life after death if I can't see it?"

And there is the Philip in me that says, "Give me a sign - just one indication that I can really believe in eternal life. Then it won't be so hard to believe!"

But I receive no certain word, and no sign - only the words, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

So I find the current life-after-death research intriguing and interesting. I hope it continues. Faith does not fear knowledge. Faith does not fall when old ways of thinking fall away.

Kübler-Ross, Moody, and the rest could be proved wrong - or they could be right.

Faith says, "I will cling to the words of Christ, "I am the way, the truth, and the life". Faith stands firm upon the event of the resurrected Christ.

Because, then, that Christ has mastered life and death I believe finally -

3. The New life which Christ gives starts now!

Jesus was a part of Judaism which believed in a resurrection of the body. But he also brought a new message in his day!

Let us go with Jesus to Bethany where his friend Lazarus had just died. Mary, Lazarus's sister, runs to meet him, and says; "Lord if you had been here my brother wouldn't have died." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again". Mary answered him, "I know he will rise again in the last day". And then Jesus spoke to her these words. "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me shall never die. Can you believe this?"

And that has been the challenge of the ages to everyone who has been confronted by Christ, "Are ye able when the shadows close around you with the sod, to believe that spirit triumphs, to commend your soul to God?"

Can we believe that eternal life starts now? Can we believe that the New Life in Christ is the life which has conquered death?

That same voice calls to us today, "Are you able to lead a New Life - the kind of life which will risk, will dare, to live a life which lives according to love?"

For, strangely enough, New Life, eternal life, begins when in the Gethsemane of life, there is a tug-of-war between love, and selfpreservation, and love wins out.

Thornton Wilder says in Bridge Over the San Luis Rey,

"There is a land of the living
And a land of the dead,
And the bridge is love."

Orville Kelly is the best illustration of this bridge that I know. He is in his forties, and is dying of cancer. He may have died since I last saw him.

Through his suffering he has started an organization called "Make Today Count". People of all ages with terminal illness come together in this organization to combat the loneliness and isolation of the terminally ill, to share and to help each other.

Orville's own feelings and consolation about his dying come through a poem he has written entitled: For My Wife Wanda - Love Will Never Go Away!"

"Spring, and the land lies fresh green
Beneath a yellow sun.
We walked the land together, you and I
And never knew what future days would bring.
Will you often think of me,
When flowers burst forth each year?
When the earth begins to grow again?
Some say death is so final,
But my love for you can never die.
Just as the sun once warmed our hearts,
Let this love touch you some night,
When I am gone,
And loneliness comes -
Before the dawn begins to scatter
Your dreams away.

Summer, and I never knew a bird
 Could sing so sweet and clear,
 Until they told me I must leave you
 For a while.
 I never knew the sky could be so deep a blue,
 Until I knew I could not grow old with you
 But better to be loved by you,
 Than to have lived a million summers
 And never known your love.
 together, let us, you and I
 Remember the days and nights,
 For eternity.

Fall, and the earth begins to die,
 And leaves turn golden-brown upon the trees.
 Remember me, too, in autumn, for I will walk with you,
 As of old, along a city sidewalk at evening-time,
 Though I cannot hold you by the hand.

Winter, and perhaps someday there may be
 Another fireplace, another room,
 With crackling fire and fragrant smoke,
 And turning, suddenly, we will be together,
 And I will hear your laughter and touch your face,
 And hold you close to me again.
 But, until then, If loneliness should seek you out,
 Some winter night, when snow is falling down,
 Remember, though death has come to me,
 Love will never go away!"

Are ye able when the shadows close around you with the sod?
 To believe that spirit triumphs? To commend your soul to God?

I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is
 able to keep that which I committed unto him against that day!